
company Solo One. At times, she has served as a faculty member, student advisor, and a Dean of the College of Arts, Sciences, and Professional Studies. Currently, she is the Director of the Master of Arts in Creative Writing low residency program, which she co-founded with Dr. J. Michael Lennon.

2004 First Novel Fellowship winner

Smelcer sells second and third novels, fourth underway

By Dave Nightingale, JJLS Board

It may be a cliché but it's a commonly-accepted fact in the writing community that it may be harder to manufacture a successful second novel than it is to get a first novel published. (For instance, James Jones spent six years working on *Some Came Running* after the publication of *From Here to Eternity*.)

That's not so, however, for John Smelcer, the winner of the 2004 James Jones First Novel Fellowship contest, for his entry *The Trap*.

The Alaskan native sold his first novel to New York publisher Henry Holt & Co. just after Thanksgiving, 2004, less than seven weeks after he claimed the Fellowship prize at the Jones national symposium in Robinson.

But the hard-cover edition of *The Trap*, which is a candidate for the National Book Award, didn't reach the stores until just this September.

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Smelcer sells second and third novels

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"Finally! *Voila!*" cried the author. "I want to thank everyone at the Jones Society for making this a reality."

In the 22-month interim between the sale and publication, Smelcer proceeded to write and sell his second and third novels, *Stealing Indians* and *Cain*—to Henry Holt and Random House respectively—and currently is at work on his fourth novel, *The Great Death*.

The Trap, called "unforgettable...brilliant" by famed author Ray Bradbury, is about an elderly Alaskan Indian who finds himself ensnared in a wolf trap, far from the nearest village, and the decision by his 17-year-old grandson to search for and rescue him in 40 degree below zero weather.

Stealing Indians, to be published in 2007, deals with the U.S. government's attempt in the late 19th Century to transplant Native American youths to boarding schools around the country (such as the one at Carlisle, PA) in an attempt to "civilize" them and teach them the "proper" ways of the white man—and of the difficulties that the youngsters experienced. (Steven Spielberg produced a cable TV docudrama on the subject in 2005, with Donald Sutherland in the role of the boarding school headmaster.)

Cain, of course, is about the Bible's first murderer, a story uniquely told in the first person by the title subject. The novel is likely to become somewhat controversial, but Smelcer would not be offended if it sells as well as the *DaVinci Code*. Saul Bellows already has supplied a laudatory cover blurb for *Cain* when published. (This was Smelcer's first fiction-writing attempt about a subject other than Native Americans.)

The Great Death is a fictional piece with a factual background. It is the story based on the lives of Smelcer's two full-blood Indian grandmothers, Mary Smelcer and Morrie Secondchief, both recently deceased, who as young sisters were the last two survivors of a plague that killed everyone else in the little town of Tazlina Lake Village, AK. "I have to balance the narrative carefully in this one," said the author. "Their families, their sons and daughters will read this one day. It must be tempered with love and courage."

Smelcer also recently produced a nonfiction work in which he interviewed survivors of a March, 1964, tsunami created by the Great Alaskan Earthquake. The book, published in January, now is in its second printing and is a contender for an international prize for nonfiction.

"I've said it before and I'll say it again," Smelcer noted. "Winning the Jones Fellowship really opened the door for me and things have been rushing along ever since." (The Society's role is credited in the forward to *The Trap* and also on the dust jacket.)

Now a temporary resident of Binghamton, NY, Smelcer usually divides his time between his home in Anchorage, AK, suburb Chugiak, where his wife Pam is a teacher; his writing cabin in the woods 100 miles north at Talkeetna; and at Wilkes University, Wilkes-Barre, PA, where he is a member of the graduate creative writing faculty.

A former professor at the University of Alaska Anchorage and at the Anchorage campus of Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, he also is the associate publisher and poetry editor at the national literary magazine *Rosebud* and was the 2004 winner of the prestigious Kessler Poetry Prize for his poetry book *Without Reservation*.

And, in his "spare" time, Smelcer, who is of Ahtna Athabaskan Indian descent, is the executive director of the Ahtna Tribe's Heritage Foundation and the only surviving speaker, reader and writer of the Ahtna language. He also was the author of the first, last and only Ahtna-English dictionary.