

THE WEEPING

Katy author O'Dell Hutchison pens young adult ghost story

Written by Cherri Northcutt

Katy author O'Dell Hutchison didn't have to look far for inspiration for his new young adult novel, *The Weeping*. Set in a small coastal town, the supernatural thriller involves a modern-day ghost story. The idea for the book came when Hutchison was directing a play at the Country Playhouse in west Houston. "I was at the theater late one night by myself painting the set," Hutchison explains. "I looked up and I could swear I saw someone standing in the spot loft. Then, the lights went out. I don't know why we lost power, but I thought, 'There's a ghost up here!'"

A Supernatural Thriller

Hutchison admits to having an overactive imagination, but after several of the cast members also reported mysterious sightings at the local theater, he became inspired to pen a ghost story set in a theater.

Taking place in a small coastal community, *The Weeping* is a supernatural thriller featuring Heath, who spends a summer in the fictional town of Rock Harbor after a car accident takes the lives of his three

best friends. While helping his uncle re-open an old opera house, Heath encounters the ghost of a young woman who died in a fire 20 years earlier.

Charting a Creative Course

Growing up in the small town of Malta, Idaho, Hutchison wrote stories and plays for his cousins and siblings to perform. "I was the weird kid in school, because I loved book reports and writing my own stories," he shares. Hutchison continued writing throughout college, at the encouragement of his professors. "When the first student loan payment came due, I realized I needed to do something more substantial," he recalls.

Now, he juggles a busy professional schedule, working during the day as a business systems analyst at MD Anderson Cancer Center. In the evenings and on weekends, he directs a community theater group. He's also a literary critic on his book review blog, booktwirps.com. Finding time to write can sometimes be a challenge, but he nonetheless makes it a priority in his busy schedule. "I'm constantly reading and reviewing books as they come out,"

Hutchison explains, adding, "I don't know how I do everything."

Hutchison let his writing lapse for a 10-year period, while pursuing his career as a systems analyst. Then, a friend suggested that he sign up for National Novel Writing Month, an annual creative writing project at nanowrimo.org. It takes place every November and challenges writers to complete a novel in only 30 days. "This doesn't allow you time to keep going back and editing; you just write and get your story out there," says Hutchison. The exercise resulted in his first novel, *All About Daisy*, which explores the issues of bullying and mean-girl cliques in high school. The book is currently out of print, but may soon be rereleased by Hutchison's new publisher, HC&B Publishing.

Juggling Writing and Life

Having a schedule definitely helps Hutchison stay on track. "I have Fridays off, so I make myself sit down for three hours and just write," he shares. "It's really a matter of scheduling your time, [since] all of these things are so important to me." Even with his job,

Inspired by a spooky experience at a local community theater, O'Dell Hutchison was inspired to write *The Weeping*, a supernatural thriller featuring a haunted opera house



Photo by Andres Quinteiro

writing, and theater work, Hutchison still finds time for a hobby. "I like to knit," he shares. "When my brain is going a hundred miles an hour, it helps me decompress."

Another challenge all writers are bound to encounter is writer's block. "It's inevitable," Hutchison admits, "but there are cool tricks to get the creative juices flowing." One trick he suggests is to write a description of an ordinary household object performing an unusual type of action. "Like a water bottle suddenly spewing out its contents," Hutchison explains. "How does that look? I write down everything I'm visualizing in my mind."

Calling Katy Home

After college, Hutchison did an internship in Houston and has been here ever since, enjoying all that the Katy community has to offer. "I thought it would be fun to go down to Texas for six months," he remembers. "[Now], it's been 15 years." After living in Houston's Heights neighborhood for a while,

Hutchison decided to move to Katy because of its welcoming, small-town feel. "Houston's huge. I just wasn't used to that," Hutchison explains. "I'm not a city boy by any means."

Now, he loves calling Katy home. "There's plenty to do here, but it's also peaceful and quiet; it feels more like a community." His favorite writing spots around town are Panera Bread on I-10 or Starbucks. "I have my laptop and my iPad and I can write on both," he says.

A New Chapter

In March to celebrate the release of *The Weeping*, Hutchison will take part in a virtual book tour. "Instead of flying around the country, bloggers will review the book and do interviews on scheduled dates," he explains. You can follow the tour at otothedell.com. *The Weeping* is available through Barnes and Noble, as well as on amazon.com. **KM**

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