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cover story

or five times, starting around Christmas, maybe, before leading up to the March, April timeframe.

Who did you work with in putting the book together?

WriteLife LLC is based here in Omaha. They work with some local authors, they work with some not in Omaha as well, and their whole thing is getting writers published. It's been a really good experience ... Cindy was awesome, Cindy Grady, [my editor] at WriteLife. Great cheerleader. [I also worked] with [designer] Eric Downs on the cover, he was [great] too, because, after I met him – and we met through Twitter – I said, “Hey, here’s this crazy thing I’m doing, and here’s the thing, Eric, I can’t give you any graphic design help whatsoever.” He was a good ally in that I knew his work was going to be class-A quality. And I was like, “Well, I need the inside to reflect the outside.”

What kinds of challenges did you encounter during the writing process?

It’s a really solitary process ... I did not tell any of my family about the book until February or March of this year, just because I really wanted to maintain the focus on getting it ready. Because if I started telling people about it when I was working on it, then I’m already putting it out there when I’m not even done. So it was hard.

[Also,] you’re so married to the work. It’s like, it was me and the paper. Me, my Macintosh, and Microsoft Word. The challenge was, I think, getting outside myself and thinking about a reader. I thought a lot while working on the book about the people who know me and who know of these stories, they would find them entertaining – but someone like you, who doesn’t know my past and doesn’t know these stories, what would their reaction be?

Being nerdy almost seems cool these days – look at “geek chic,” Harry Potter, Weezer, etc. Did that have anything to do with the tone of *Nerdy Thirty*?

I don’t know why geek chic is so big right now ... It’s funny, a few people have asked me that, with the timing – [referencing] *Ugly Betty* and *Glee*, neither of which I watch. I don’t know. I suppose subconsciously those things had influenced me in some way, but I’ve never watched any of those shows at all ... I don’t know why now. For me, it was my 30th birthday and saying, “Okay, paper says I should be a grown-up, but I still feel like I’m 11 in a lot of ways.” So I think that had a lot to do with it.

What advice do you have for other writers or would-be writers?

Anybody who is thinking about a book likely has a full-time job and other commitments. No one has the time to do a book like, I do not have the luxury to just take a year off and just explore my thoughts and write a book. You have to make time. Just like I make time for *The Hills* and *The City* on Tuesday nights and *Pawn Stars* on the History Channel – you make choices in your day. I’m a big morning person.

When I was in college, I was like, “Oh, I can stay up all night and work on stuff.” No. Now my best times are like from 5 to 6:30 or 7 in the morn-

ing before work, and also Saturday and Sunday. But that’s just how I work, and that’s when I can get my best stuff out there. And I make time for it. Yeah, I could sleep in, and yeah, I could spend a Saturday at the mall, go see a movie. The way I work around that is – I spent a lot of time editing the book at home, but I also did a lot of it at coffee shops, Aromas, Crane, I think I hit all of them, all the chains in town. Because when you’re working at home, it’s so easy to say, “Oh, I’ve got to go do that load of laundry, oh, yeah, I need to empty the dishwasher,” if I get stuck or get bored. So by being out in public, it helps ... Honestly, I cannot tell you – I’m serious – the Homey Inn is the bar that I mentioned [in the story “More Observations on Literature And Inebriation”]. I had so many good times writing there and it was just great. I’m telling you, it’s such sensory rich space to be in. It was just great.

What do you want readers to take away from *Nerdy Thirty*?

Familiarity. To read these essays and say, “Oh my god, I can remember a time when I felt like that.” And granted, the book is steeped in a lot of the idea of leading up to turning 30, so there’s that. But I think just the stories of – we are in these awkward stages as kids and growing up into adults ... [And] this book is intended to be fun.

I want someone to sit down and enjoy reading it. I don’t want to call this required reading. I want it to be really enjoyable. You don’t have to read it in order, I didn’t structure the essays to be chronological or anything...there were some changes that some of the editors suggested – a

“Okay, paper says I should be a grown-up, but I still feel like I’m 11 in a lot of ways.”

lot of them wanted me to open the book with the essay about my experience working at the *Gateway*, “On Deadline,” but I didn’t want to set the tone that this is a book about writing, and I felt like if I opened with that essay, it would’ve been like, “Oh, this is a book just about writing – well, I’m not a writer, so no thanks.” But the River City Roundup [essay, “Save a Horse – Ride A Cowboy (Or So I’ve Been Told)”] – I think everyone can look at that and say, “There was a time in my life where I was dragged somewhere and thought, “Oh my f***ing god, what am I doing here, I am so out of my comfort zone.” But you can laugh about it. I want people to laugh when they read this book. And reading it with a bottle of wine probably helps. **S**”