

Rewriting His Future

Terry Cromwell '79L won't let cancer stifle creativity

Thursday, March 28, 2019

•
•
•



Brain tumor. Before he heard those words, Terrence “Terry” Cromwell '79L had served as a sergeant in the Marine Corps, raised three children with his wife of 43 years and built a successful and varied legal career that included work in corporate law, construction law and high-tech. Cancer, and the treatments that came with it, brought that career to a halt.

“But lucky for me, when I was diagnosed I had enjoyed a long history of creative writing, with the publishers’ rejections beginning in the '70s to prove it,” Cromwell says, his wit — and his refusal to let illness stifle his creativity or his humor — evident in each

comment he makes. “My reward for beating a 2008 prostate cancer diagnosis was a brain tumor in 2011.”

Post-diagnosis and through his still-ongoing treatment — in the midst of which he could not speak, walk, see clearly or swallow, necessitating an emergency tracheostomy — Cromwell has had a strategy. “I’ve been evolving my writing from avocation to vocation, building my manuscripts on more personal foundations and writing my new works under a nom-de-plume,” he says.

In 2017, he launched his literary website at www.railbak.com. Knowing firsthand the financial and emotional impact of what he describes as a HENS — health, education, nutrition and safety — issue can take on a family, Cromwell’s goal is to see his “Railbak” series help fund the Hugs Foundation, a nonprofit organization to assist children and families in crisis, named in honor of his wife, Mary-Glynn “Hugs” Cromwell. Cromwell — or “Tc” as he’s known on his new literary website — describes his “crazy fun” work and life: “I did a lot of things I would describe as nontraditional in the work- place,” he says, “primarily to relax people I worked with.” The fourth-generation Montanan’s literary creations include characters and circumstances inspired by his work and life: Marines he served with, fellow undergrad and law students, colleagues he worked with from Africa to Australia to the Arctic and his own family members.



“I’ve finally written the books I wrote in my mind for the better part of those four-plus decades,” he says, “since meeting and serving with people whose personalities make up my main character.” He says that Railbak, like virtually all his characters, is an amalgam of characteristics he’s observed in the people he’s been lucky enough to know.

And UNH Law has played no small part in his life as a writer.

He recalls riding his bike to the barn on Mountain Road in Concord that was home to the school then known as Franklin Pierce Law Center (FPLC) and arriving late for a class taught by Dean Robert Marshall Viles. “I heard from the front of the class, ‘And your thoughts, Mr. Cromwell?’ I knew nothing I could say would be intelligent and responded something to the effect, ‘Dean Viles, did you ever have one of those days when you wish you could come up with a brilliant response but you realize it would be

hopeless to try?’ Much to my delight, the dean said he knew exactly what I was talking about.”

Cromwell also remembers pitching in on the physical construction of FPLC: He and his fellow students hung drywall, painted, and helped design interior spaces. In addition to preparing him for his career, those law school experiences provided inspiration for his art. When he starts to write, Cromwell says, “I oftentimes recall how my relationship with the dean filled out into a dimensional friendship over the years from that late arrival to class in the bull barn. The memory inspires me to simply begin the project and allow the characters to pull me forward, over the years, to see what happens.”

Cromwell’s advice? “If you are struck down by one of life’s challenges and you yearn for your life to continue operating on a purposeful plane, refocus on rewriting your life’s future chapters differently than you previously scripted them.”

- WRITTEN BY:

[Jennifer Saunders](#) | Communications and Public Affairs
| jennifer.saunders@unh.edu | 603-862-3585

UNH MAGAZINE WINTER 2019



University of New Hampshire

UNH Today is produced for the UNH community and for friends of UNH.

The stories are written by the staff of [UNH Communications and Public Affairs](#).

Email us: unhtoday.editor@unh.edu.

[MANAGE YOUR SUBSCRIPTION](#) [CONTACT US](#)

Like us on Facebook

Follow us on Twitter

Follow us on YouTube

Follow us on Instagram

Find us on LinkIn

UNH Today RSS feeds

UNH Today • UNH Main Directory: 603-862-1234

Copyright © 2021 • TTY Users: 7-1-1 or 800-735-2964 (Relay NH)

[USNH Privacy Policies](#) • [USNH Terms of Use](#) • [ADA Acknowledgement](#)