

On the Books

Omaha author grabs readers with danger, wicked humor

By Liza Holtmeier
Senior staff writer

Richard Dooling makes John Grisham look as if he's in kindergarten, says Brent Spencer.

With his expansive knowledge of the law and his penchant for hot topics, Dooling creates books wickered in their sense of humor and thrilling in their intrigue, Spencer said.

Spencer, the director of creative writing at Creighton University, has only good things to say about Dooling, an Omaha native and resident who has been writing sharp, provocative books for the last 10 years.

"His books are about people in dangerous places doing dangerous things. He has a richer and nastier sense of human nature than John Grisham.

"He also has this wild imagination. I wonder, 'Where does he come up with this stuff?'" Spencer said.

A fitting question given the range of topics in Dooling's first four books: neurobiology, witchcraft, profanity and hate crimes, to name a few.

Surprisingly, Dooling gets most of his ideas from personal experience.

He based his first book, "Critical Care," on his experiences working as a respiratory therapist in St. Louis.

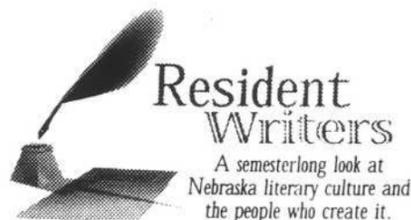
His second novel, "White Man's Grave," was influenced by his travels in Africa.

And his latest novel, "Brain Storm," draws from his years working at the largest law firm in St. Louis.

Critics and readers alike have greeted Dooling's satirical books of intrigue with hefty praise. In 1994, Dooling was a finalist for a National Book Award, and all three of his novels have been noticed by the movie industry.

Sidney Lumet, director of "The Verdict," nursed the successful "Critical Care" into a 1997 feature film of the same name. Lawrence Bender, the producer of "Pulp Fiction" and "Good Will Hunting," has optioned "White Man's Grave" for a film, while last year's "Brain Storm" has been earmarked by Alan J. Pakula, the director of "All the President's Men," "Sophie's Choice," and "Presumed Innocent." Dooling is currently writing screenplays for both projects.

Dooling said compressing a 400-page novel to a two-hour movie is the most difficult part of adapting a book for the screen.



However, despite Hollywood's draw, the multifarious writer is just as comfortable between the pages of the Wall Street Journal or the New York Times. Dooling frequently writes essays for the two papers and several magazines, expounding on topics such as hate crime legislation and the proliferation of laws.

For these articles, which Dooling generally writes in two to four hours, he relies on a biting form of satire to illustrate his points.

"You get in and you get out really fast. It's more fun than something like a screenplay or a novel that takes a lot of planning," Dooling said.

Dooling is also the author of one nonfiction book, "Blue Streak: Swearing, Free Speech and Sexual Harassment." The book, which provides satirical commentary on political correctness and the role of swearing in society, takes some of its influences from Dooling's work as an employment-discrimination lawyer.

Dooling's career as a writer has its roots in his education at Creighton Prep High School.

There, Dooling's Latin teacher, Father Hindelang, encouraged his students to keep vocabulary notebooks. If his students saw a word they didn't know, they were to look it up and write it in their notebook.

"It tends to inspire a love for words, if you don't already have one," Dooling said.

Dooling soon amassed a collection of vocabulary notebooks and continues the practice of writing unfamiliar words down to this day. Now, though, he keeps his records on computer to save space.

After his graduation from St. Louis University, Dooling said, "I was basically trying to support myself as a writer.

"That was back when you could still be trained on the job."

Dooling then took two years to travel Europe and Africa. The experience provided him with a new perspective of America and its culture.

"You don't travel abroad to see foreign countries. You travel abroad so you see your own country as a foreign country," he explained.

When Dooling came back to the states, he decided to attend law school at St. Louis University.

"I really wanted to have a family. I said to myself, 'At this point, how can I make a living reading and writing?'" he said. "The legal writing I did was every bit as good as the writing I did for my novels."

Please see DOOLING on 10



NATIONALLY KNOWN AND critically acclaimed, Omaha author Richard Dooling is a leading example of Nebraska's new generation of authors - defined by talent rather than geography.

next project begins with the screen. After finishing a novella for Esquire, Dooling plans to write a screenplay, the specifics of which he cannot disclose.

Love inspires gallery's February exhibits

■ Jewelry, pottery, sculpture and graphic art make the Noyes a place for lovers.

By Liza Holtmeier
Senior staff writer

Love is in the air. And at the Noyes Gallery, it's also in the sculptures, the paintings, the pottery and the jewelry.

In celebration of the month of love, the Noyes Gallery, 119 S. Ninth St., will exhibit various Valentine's Day-inspired art works in this month's showing. The gallery will also sponsor a special Valentine's Day opening from 1 to 5 p.m. on Feb. 14.

"We wanted to let people combine their love with their love of the arts," explained Lois Meysenburg, a watercolorist with Noyes.

The exhibited love-filled works include stained glass angels, heart-shaped metal boxes and pottery hearts holding hearts.

But not all the works are tokens to love. Noyes continues its tradition of eclectic exhibits this month by showcasing woodcuts, sculptures and pastels side by side. The gallery

will also have its regular monthly opening this Friday from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.

In its Focus Gallery, Noyes will exhibit the works of four guest artists, all of whom are new to the gallery.

Amy Sadle will showcase pieces from her printmaking collection as well as some stained glass.

Sadle agreed to exhibit at the Noyes after seeing the camaraderie between the artists.

"A lot of people are intimidated by art galleries, but the Noyes Gallery is very open and cheerful," she said.

The Noyes achieves this openness by allowing the artists to meet with potential buyers during the openings, Sadle said. This gives the artists a chance to establish an important bond with those interested in their work.

"Art isn't a commodity that you buy out of necessity. You buy it out of an emotional need," Sadle said. When an artist sells a piece, "it's like someone adopting one of your children. It's a much easier process if you know the personalities of the buyers."

After Sadle agreed to exhibit, co-owner Julia Noyes asked if the new talent could recommend any other artists to share the display

Please see NOYES on 10



Gallery Preview

The Facts

What: February gallery opening
Where: Noyes Gallery, 119 S. Ninth St.
When: Friday 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. and Feb. 14, 1 to 5 p.m.
Cost: No charge

The Skinny: Noyes Gallery presents special Valentine's Day art plus four new guest artists



ART COURTESY OF NOYES GALLERY
ABOVE- "PLAYIN' THE BAYOU BLUES," a mixed-media canvas painting by Lois Meysenburg, appears in the Noyes focus gallery for the February exhibition.

ART COURTESY OF NOYES GALLERY
ABOVE LEFT-SCOTTSLUFF NATIVE Carol Sexton offers a variety of Nebraska landscape scenes this month at the Noyes Gallery.