

Inspiration flows through the tip of a pencil

John W. Barry, [Poughkeepsie Journal](#) 5:20 p.m. EDT July 23, 2014

A 1988 graduate of Millbrook High School, author Chris Orcutt finds expression in writing fiction.



(Photo: Spencer Ainsley/Poughkeepsie Journal)

He could use a laptop computer, an iPad or even a typewriter. But author Chris Orcutt of Millbrook often writes with a pencil, at least on a first draft.

"If you're typing along at a good clip, it almost becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy," the 1988 graduate of Millbrook High School said. "The cursor is going across the screen and you just kind of fill it in with the first word that occurs to you."

Writing with a pencil, Orcutt, a native of Maine, said, "It's a tactile sensation, where what you have to say is coming out of you, down your arm, through the pencil, onto the page. And your handwriting can reflect your mood. It reflects the mood of the scene you're writing."

Orcutt enjoys framing out scenes, coloring them with moods and wrapping them tight in fiction. As an author, he has released numerous books, including "One Hundred Miles from [Manhattan](#)," which was published earlier this year and features the community of Wellington, which was inspired by Millbrook. The book is described on its back cover as "A novel about an upscale rural community — Wellington, N.Y. — where the hills and the seemingly quaint village conceal lives of love, lust, adultery, tragedy and small wars."

Orcutt has also written detective novels. The Dakota Stevens mystery series features a gumshoe who splits his time between Millbrook and Manhattan, and comes to life in "A Real Piece of Work" and "The Rich Are Different." Underscoring Orcutt's versatility as a writer is "The Man, The Myth, The Legend," a collection of short stories.

"A Real Piece of Work" received a No. 1 ranking in literary fiction for Kindle and a No. 4 tally for mystery novels. And the Millbrook Free Library recently had a waiting list for people wanting to read "One Hundred Miles from Manhattan."

"It's terrific," said Joan Frenzel, interim director of the Millbrook Free Library, on the demand from local readers for Orcutt's work.

Orcutt's ability to view the world through fictional characters and develop story lines and settings that resonate with readers is likely informed by the many ways in which he has pursued, wrangled with and lassoed the written word.

He has worked for newspapers, including as a freelance writer at the Poughkeepsie Journal. He taught high school American history and English, along with European history, in Maine. He worked in marketing and communications for a software start-up; worked on website navigation for [J.P. Morgan](#), client communications at [Merrill Lynch](#), and served as an adjunct lecturer at [Baruch College](#) in New York City, teaching freshman composition, introduction to literature and business communication classes. Orcutt has also worked as a speechwriter and has written scripts for corporate industrial films as well as annual reports for companies.

Orcutt, while teaching at Baruch, began writing full time, with his fiction getting published in literary journals and his non-fiction appearing in magazines. He moved back to Millbrook in 2006 and "A Real Piece of Work," his first novel, was published in 2011.

He credits the education he received at Millbrook High School with steering him toward a philosophy degree in college, which led him down the path of writing.

"I am very pleased that a Millbrook graduate is experiencing such great success in the literary world," said Philip D. D'Angelo Jr., superintendent of the Millbrook Central School District. "Chris has demonstrated that his innate intellect and his educational experiences, including his time in the Millbrook School District, have paid off."

For the inspiration that drives it all, Orcutt looks locally and globally.

Asked what inspires him, he said, "The hills of Millbrook. My grandparents had a place in [Union Vale](#), going back to the '50s. The hills and those lovely valleys, and in the woods and the horse farms. I know the topography in that area probably as well as some mapmakers. I just know it, going back to being a kid and wandering through the woods and walking on the road in the fall. I'm in love with it on a Thoreau-vian level."

Orcutt also finds inspiration in the women of [Paris](#) — "I was just charmed by these women, dressed up, dressed to the nines and commuting to work, with hats and high heel shoes, on bicycles, in Paris traffic"; and the women of [Scotland](#), the country from which his ancestors came — "I just sort of

found them strong and forthright and no nonsense."

And his wife, Alexas, inspires him as well.

"I don't get my ideas from her," he said. "But she creates an environment where the ideas feel comfortable coming in."

Asked what he hopes to draw out of readers, Orcutt responded, "I want to knock their socks off."

John W. Barry: jobarry@poughkeepsiejournal.com, 845-437-4822; Twitter: @JohnBarryPoJo

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