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FIVE WORDS A DAY FOR TWENTY YEARS; THE NOVELLA *BUZZ* EMERGES AT A GLACIAL PACE

Seattle, Washington - November 20, 2012 - First-time author Robert Zverina on how not to write the Great American Novel

“What could be easier than writing a book?” asks the eponymous narrator of Robert Zverina’s recently released novella, *BUZZ*. It’s just one of many subtle jokes offering comic relief in this darkly lyric account of a talented underachiever’s search for connection and meaning in the stultifying New York City suburbs of Long Island at the end of the 20th century. *BUZZ* reads so matter-of-factly one might never guess this slender book—a mere 104 pages—is the result of twenty years’ labor.

Author Robert Zverina explains, “When I first started back in 1992 I figured I’d knock it out in eight months. But though I had a BA in English and an MFA in Poetry, neither of those things really prepared me for the reality of writing a novel. I thought I knew what I wanted to do but as I worked a very different narrative began to emerge. Through an almost unconscious process I started to write myself into the story.”

What at first was a dystopian novel of ideas called *Vegetable Dreams* gradually shed its more fanciful aspects to become truer to Zverina’s experience growing up as the only American-born child in an eccentric family of recently emigrated Czech political refugees. The result is a highly compressed multigenerational saga whose quirky characters emerge with snapshot clarity through a series of poetic vignettes that are by turns funny, disturbing, and touching. “I started by planning, outlining, and drafting in a very precise, intellectual manner but ended up writing from the heart.”

How much of *BUZZ* is autobiographical? “The fabric of the story is grounded in experience but the pattern is my own invention. Milan Kundera says it best, ‘The novelist demolishes the house of his life and uses its bricks to build the house of his novel.’ *BUZZ* isn’t a literal account but it does evoke a certain mood that will be familiar to immigrants and first generation Americans. The scenes don’t depict actual people or events but are emblematic of the struggle of being caught between two cultures and not really fitting into either one. The only episode which happened pretty much as described is Buzz’s ride on the conveyor belt through a scalding hot dish machine. I really did do that! That said, I am not Buzz. He is an exaggeration of my more cynical and self-destructive side. He’s what I might have become if I hadn’t found the things he’s so desperately seeking—love, friendship, and meaningful work.”

Asked if he feels expectations will be unduly high when people learn the book was 20 years in the making Zverina laughs. “Five words a day, five pages per year—those are just averages. Much of the time the manuscript was set aside, ignored but not forgotten. The bulk of the work was accomplished at the ends—start and finish—with long periods of gestation punctuated by random bursts of activity. Otherwise I was working, enjoying an accidental art career, and writing 2,000 pages of a blog [www.zverina.com]. I could have had a kid; instead I had this book moping around the house. I watched it mature and the time finally came to kick it out of the nest. It’s on its own now and I’m just hoping people will give *BUZZ* a chance by picking up the book and turning to page one. Mainly I’m curious to hear what people have to say about it. After two decades of living with it, the really interesting part—the dialogue—has just begun.”

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