



Visiting author Tommy Hays talks about life, family, and writing

By Kyle Jackola
Staff Writer

More often than not, readings by guest authors are hit-or-miss events at Brevard College, but Thursday night's Grace Creech Lecture featuring local author Tommy Hays was well attended by students, faculty, and community members. Hays held an informal public question and answer session earlier that afternoon to talk to students and faculty about inspiration for his books, his family, and life as a writer in Western North Carolina. Before the reading, several students and faculty had the opportunity to have dinner with Hays and listen as he delved more into his personal life and what he enjoys doing for fun at home in Asheville. At 7:30 p.m. in MG 125, Hays read selections from three of his books, one of which is set to be released this September.

Hays is a soft-spoken, gentle looking man who grew up in Greenville, SC and attended Furman University for his undergraduate degree. He said his decision to be a writer was both easy and difficult at the same time. "Both my parents were writers when I was younger," said Hays. "My mother wrote for a newspaper and my father wrote for magazines. This meant I was sort of immersed in the writing culture from the beginning. When I went off to Furman, I chose to major in English because I knew my parents would be supportive of my decision. However, after a while, I also found them to be two of my biggest critics."

From growing up in a house of writers, Hays said that his experiences from his youth became a natural starting place when he began writing novels. Hays mentioned that he drew from events in his life, but always tries to start fresh with a place and people in that place. "In *The Pleasure Was Mine* (St. Martin Press, 2005) the story grew out of my family dealing with my father's Alzheimer's," he said. "I wrote 200 pages of memoir about it before I ever wrote the novel. I documented a lot of our discussions because I thought 'I'm losing my daddy and I want to remember our last times.' I worked hard to write that all up, and after a year they moved my father to a nursing home, which became really depressing because he lived in Greenville and I lived in Asheville. It was

really hard on me going back and forth and I didn't think I could sustain that much longer. But then I had people read it, and one was my agent who told me to set it aside and write an informed story about Alzheimer's but not let it be about me and my family." Hays set aside the initial memoir and took a few years to write *The Pleasure Was Mine* and used his experience with his father and other family members to help shape the characters and events in his novel.

When asked about his particular writing process, Hays gave the same advice that so many writers have before him. "It's important to pick a time of day you can work, and stick to that time every day. I like to write in the mornings between 9 a.m. and 12 p.m.," he said. "I find it extremely important to write every day, because otherwise I lose track of where I stopped and I lose some emotional momentum. Even if I check in with my

characters for half an hour, like if it's a bad day, I still find that helpful. I also allow myself breaks: I drink tea, get up and look out the window, sorta spy on the neighbors and see what's going on, and then I get back to work. I always sit back down at my desk and keep writing. So that's the main thing, just going through that ritual every day."

Hays newest novel, *What I Came to Tell You*, is set to be released this September with Egmont USA publishing. The novel is classified as young-adult literature, but Hays said he had no intention of writing for a particular audience and that the story just lent itself more naturally to a younger crowd. When asked what it was about, he replied "Ha, I'm not entirely sure myself, but you'll have to wait until September to find out."

For information on Tommy Hays, to view samples of his works, or to contact him, visit www.tommyhays.com

SAVE THE DATE

APRIL
15-18

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SAVE THE DATE . FOR HOUSING

Housing Selection Process by Classifications
In the Dining Hall Lobby from 11-2 & 5-7
MUST BE PRE-REGISTERED FOR CLASSES

Monday, April 15
Super Seniors

Tuesday, April 16
Rising Seniors

Wednesday, April 17
Rising Juniors
(Held at the Porter Center During Lunch)

Thursday, April 18
Rising Sophomores