

Elon professor's fear of children inspires 'Kids These Days'

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The crying, the screaming, the constant attention — all are reasons people are dissuaded from having children. Even after having kids, Elon University English professor Andrew Perry said he still lives with the fear of fatherhood, so he decided to write a book about it.

"Kids These Days" tells the story of married couple Walter and Alice. They relocate to Florida, where Walter unknowingly accepts a shady job from his brother-in-law in order to make ends meet. On top of that, the two are expecting their first child, something that completely petrifies Walter.

Perry said the novel's inspiration emerged from his own fear of raising a child.

"I really wanted to keep living that life where I was not really responsible," Perry said. "The scariest thing is that they are there every single day."

Ultimately his wife, fellow Elon professor Tita Ramirez, was the driving force that convinced him to have children.

"I [told] him I knew he would be a good father and that I wanted to be a mother with someone who would be good at it," Ramirez said. "Except the truth is I'm pretty sure I didn't convince him. Our son, when he arrived and once he was old enough to laugh and hold a cracker and use baby sign language, convinced him."

The couple had two sons while Perry was in the middle of writing his book. But welcoming his children into the world put "Kids These Days" on the back burner.

It took Perry about a year to complete the first draft of the book and three more years to finish it, and he said the book would have taken less time to write if their children hadn't been born while he was working on it.

Luckily for his writing, he still maintained his fear of children even after beginning to raise them.

"People kept telling me that I was going to fall in love with the kid after it was born, change my mind, and I would not be able to finish the book," Perry said. "I love my kids to death, but that did not change my fears."

And, according to Perry, raising kids is still no easy feat. He said that while the logistical aspects of parenthood are the easy part, explaining things to always-curious children is more difficult.

"I am trying to let [my son] keep his innocence for as long as he wants," Perry said. "I have not explained death yet. The other day I was about to kill a fly with a rolled up newspaper, but let it live so I wouldn't have to explain it."

Though now Perry has finished his book and can turn

his full attention back to fatherhood, he still has high hopes for "Kids These Days."

His said biggest goal for the novel is for it to reach as many people as possible, despite how scary it can be to have so many people looking at his work. He said he hopes people are able to see themselves in the book and identify with the story.

"I hope that the book is a little about growing up for the reader. To see a version of the person you want to be and want to become that you can become," Perry said. "The book is serious without taking itself too seriously. I am most interested in the ways we harm each other. The ways we do it uninten-

tionally, and how we recover from that."

"Kids These Days" was the culmination of several years of writing — a passion of Perry's that began in college when he took a creative writing course. From there, he was inspired to explore his creativity and writing ability.

"I am a novelist," Perry said. "I am better at long form than short form. I am attracted to it because it's messy, but it requires precision. There is more room to explore complicated ideas."

Despite the difficulty and stress that may come along with writing, editing and publishing a novel, Perry said he finds himself

to be happiest and a better person while working on a literary project.

"Once I feel that I have the story, I am a happy man," Perry said. "When I am writing, my life makes much more sense. Not to say it wasn't hard as hell, but I am definitely happiest when I am writing."

But Perry said he considers his son to be his greatest accomplishment.

"He's a really cool kid. And maybe something in the way we raised him has something to do with that," Perry said. "It's just crazy. It's a never-ending roller coaster, which I treat as a revelation, but everyone else already knew."

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ANDREW PERRY
ENGLISH PROFESSOR



PHOTO COURTESY OF DREW PERRY
Even though Perry said being a father to his two kids is a joyful experience, it can still be scary. This fear of raising children was what inspired him to write his most recent book, "Kids These Days."