

Following a Dream

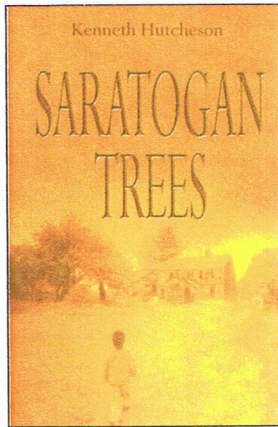
In the early 1960s, Ken Hutcheson began his 32-year career with the Colorado State Division of Rehabilitation helping mentally disabled individuals from the then Colorado State Hospital (now the Colorado Mental Health Institute at Pueblo) find employment or receive vocational training in Denver. It was during those early years that he also started his novel writing career.

"After one particularly stressful day on the job, I told my wife that I didn't know how long I could continue to work with the chronically mentally ill. As a way to relieve my own stress, I began to write my novel, *Saratogan Trees*, in 1962," said Ken.

Ken started out by rising early and writing every morning except Saturday and Sunday. "My goal was to write two pages a day and it took me two and a half years to complete a draft suitable enough to send to an editor," said Ken. Upon the advice of Robert Gottlieb, a senior editor at Simon and Schuster, and editor of *Catch 22*, Ken got a literary agent.

While continuing with his career with the Colorado State Division of Rehabilitation, where he supervised staff and became the administrator of several statewide programs in the agency, Ken kept on writing. "After three agents and innumerable rejections over a 39-year period, *Saratogan Trees* was published 40 years later by PublishAmerica," said Ken.

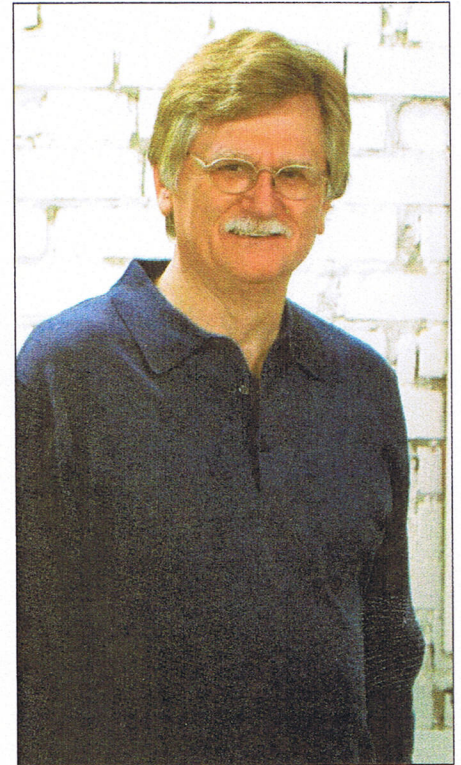
The stress of his job not only prompted Ken to write, but it also influenced the novel's theme. "It was Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* that inspired me to write my story. Lee reminded me how much I loved my childhood home in a cotton mill village in Alabama. My on the job experiences at that time also influenced me. Many times my clients were turned down for jobs or training because of their history with mental illness. To explain the gap in their employment history, the clients or I had to explain their



stay in the Colorado State Hospital. Often the door was slammed in our faces once that information was revealed. So I wrote about prejudice in a small southern town, particularly against the main character's cousin who was mentally deficient. The theme of the book is that we often make rash judgments about people without waiting to know more about them," explained Ken.

Ken retired in 1993 and is working on his second novel. He also walks two and a half miles every day, which is time he spends composing story lines. "After 40 years of wandering in the literary wilderness, my novel is now published. I have a new job title—Published Author," said Ken.

Retirement for Ken has allowed him to continue writing without the time constraints of a full-time job. "Retirement is the time to follow your dream with all your might. And, it's never too late. Never, never, give up on your dream, for that dream is you," professed Ken. 🍷



Ken Hutcheson

Photo Randall's Photography