JCOM alum comes home with his new book, 'Housekeeper’s Son' | Journalism

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Chris Loke, a 2005 master’s alumnus in journalism, was on campus for a book-signing of his new psychological thriller, The Housekeeper’s Son. Delayne Locke photo.

In 277 pages, USU alumnus Christopher Loke takes a reader on a journey of mystery and murder and addresses the blur between right and wrong in the author’s first novel, The Housekeeper’s Son.

Loke came back to USU for a book-signing at the USU Bookstore, a homecoming for the 2005 master’s graduate in journalism. During his time in Cache Valley, Loke said several of his professors influenced his writing and prepared him to enter the writing world.

“Michael Sweeney, Cathy Bullock, Penny Byrne, Ted Pease and Brenda Cooper—they are my favorites,” Loke said.

Sweeney, who was the USU journalism department head from 1996-2009, directed Loke’s master’s thesis.

“He always struck me as a very strong writer and storyteller,” said Sweeney, who now teaches at Ohio University. “I thought the book was very compelling. You would enjoy the story whether you knew anything about Utah or not.”

Sweeney said the story moves forward in a Sherlock Holmes kind of way. “The plot keeps you guessing,” he said. “It teases the audience without giving anything away.”

The Housekeeper’s Son on YouTube

“In a nutshell, it’s about a 72-year-old woman who was arrested for the murder of a 12-year-old girl,” Loke said. “She was the housekeeper for the mother of the 12-year-old victim. She was arrested and a journalist was assigned to interview her and write a feature about her.”

Loke said the journalist in the book was an obituary writer who had just switched to features journalism, and this murderer profile was his first story.

“She is the nicest woman in the community, but we come to find that the little girl was not her first victim—it was her second,” Loke said. “Her first victim was her own son at the same age of 12 years old. Everything she does afterward has to do with the death and the life of her son.”

Loke said he likes to pull from some of his own life experiences because, if he’s detached from the story, it would just be fluff.

“I wanted to write something I could relate to,” he said. “Obviously it’s dramatized. There’s a sense of hype and exaggeration in there just for entertainment value, but the theme and the subject matter is something I really care about on the side of journalism and also on the side of humanity—what is right and what is wrong?”

“The question begs, is she really the one who actually killed the girl? If not, why is she admitting to the crime?” Loke said.

As the story progresses, Loke said the role of the journalist becomes more interesting.

“No matter how objective [a journalist] is, he is often influenced by the cases he writes about,” he said. “It soon becomes something subjective and something that influences him and his life.”
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The novel, which was published in May, has already been requested by movie agents around the world and is also being considered for a Broadway play, Loke said.

When he worked as a journalist in Logan, Loke said he didn’t get to cover many big crimes. “Logan wasn’t the news center of the world,” he said.

“Have I ever interviewed a murderer or a suspected criminal? No,” he said. “But have I ever thought and studied how that is done? Yes, definitely.”

He said the plot is very hypothetical, but through his journalistic experience he was able to know how to deal with it what to expect.

Loke said he has always loved feature journalistic writing, and though the book isn’t in that format, one of the key characters lives that lifestyle.

“I wrote journalism, just news—the facts,” he said. “I combined those two and put in a little drama and creativity and came out with a nice story.”

Loke said the book is somewhat of a psychological thriller, but doesn’t have a lot of action.

“When you’re a journalist in that world, you see a lot of things that trigger your thoughts and emotions and really want to talk about it, Loke said. “I think this is a good channel for me to express and channel that.”

Cathy Bullock, another professor during Loke’s tenure at USU, said she was excited for her former student, who was also her teaching assistant.

“I’m thrilled for Chris,” Bullock said. “I hope his book is a great success and that he’ll make sequels. He always loved words and language, so this doesn’t surprise me.”

“He was a great writer then and I’m sure he’s a great writer now,” said Ted Pease, journalism department head. He said he hadn’t read The Housekeeper's Son yet, but he’s looking forward to it.