

Q&A with Frederic Fahey author of novel 'The Scoundrel's Son'

By Maxine Eisenberg
Peaks Island News

Ever since he watched "The Prince and the Pauper" as a child, Frederic Fahey had been fixated on a question: "What happens next?" A few summers ago, shortly after moving to Peaks Island full time, Fahey answered that question in the form of a 238-page historical fiction novel, "The Scoundrel's Son."

Fahey was born and raised in Massachusetts and began going to his family's summer cottage on Peaks Island when he was 10. His career has been primarily in radiology, both as a professor at Harvard Medical School and as a medical physicist, most recently at Boston Children's Hospital.

In 2019, Fahey and his wife, Chris Harper-Fahey, retired and moved to Peaks. That's when he began to write fiction. He was already an experienced academic writer and was looking for a new creative challenge. In just three months, during the summer of 2021, he wrote the first draft of "The Scoundrel's Son," which serves as a sequel to Mark Twain's "The Prince and the Pauper."

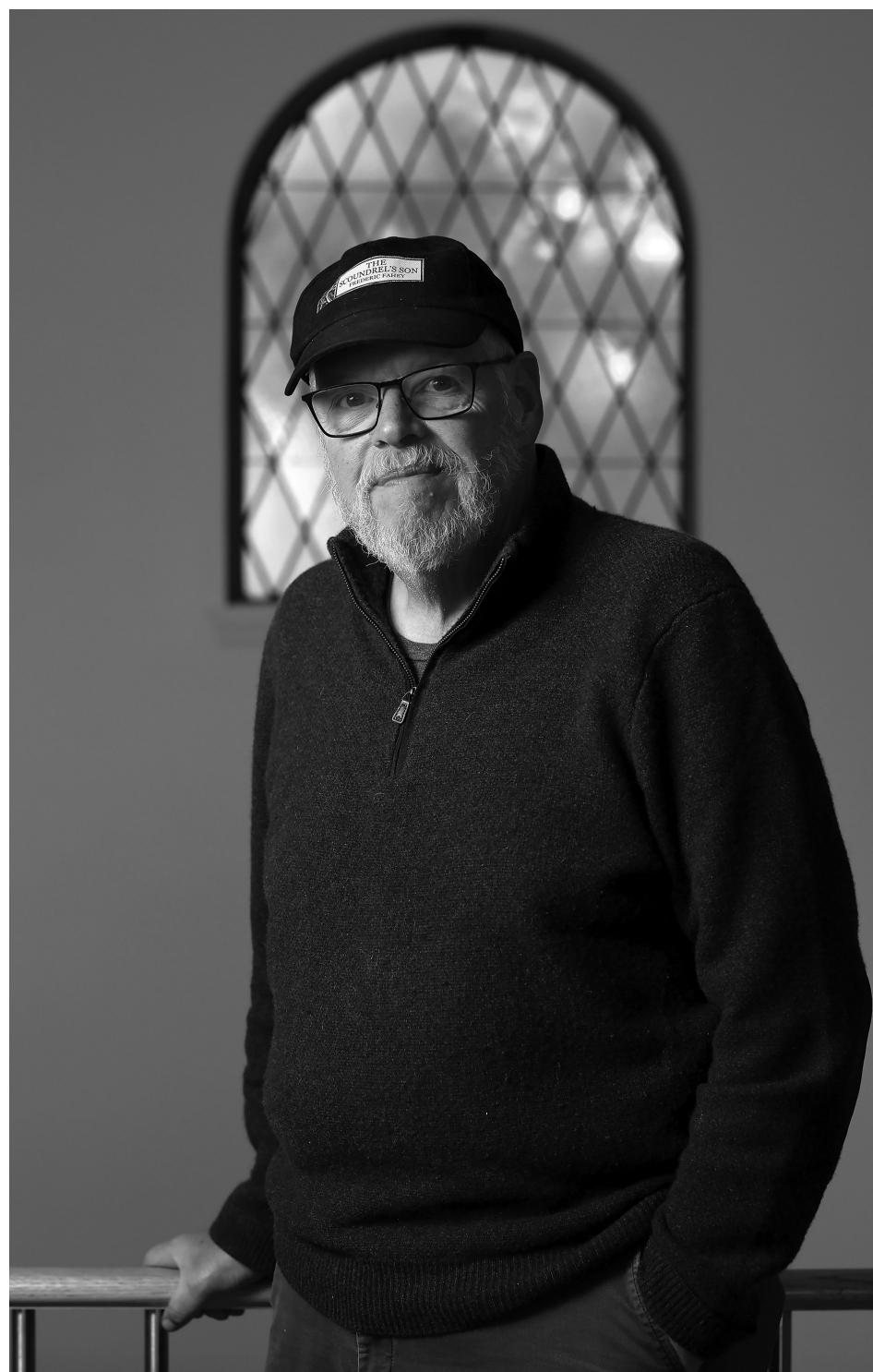
The book, which was published by Goose River Press, features artwork by three Peaks Island artists.

For this book you drew inspiration from Mark Twain's "The Prince and the Pauper." When did you first encounter the story and were you drawn to it immediately?

I did not set out to write historical fiction, but I'd been haunted by a story for many years. When I was 9 years old, I came home from school one day and the Errol Flynn version of "The Prince and the Pauper" was on the TV. I was immediately taken by the tale. When it was over, I ran to our encyclopedia to see if Edward was a real prince, and he was. Edward VI, son of Henry VIII, became king when he was 9. For decades, one question regarding Twain's tale rattled around in my head "What happened next?" Twain said Tom lived to be an old man. My encyclopedia said Edward did not. About 25 years ago, on a tour of the Tower of London, I learned of the tragic story of Lady Jane Grey and how her life intertwined with Edward's. I decided it would be interesting to introduce a girl in her teens into the tale. I wrote the book and now I know what happened next.

The characters in your book feel so carefully crafted. How much of their personalities were drawn from Twain's originals, and how much came from your own imagination?

Since this was my first novel, I decided I would borrow from both history and Twain. Both provided a wealth of fascinating characters but came with some responsibility. I'm putting words in the mouths of some of the most famous folks of English history. I strived to give the reader a sense of these folks. So far, my Tudor friends seem to be pleased, for instance, with my portrait of Lady Jane



Ben McCanna/Peaks Island News

Frederic Fahey's debut novel picks up where "The Prince and the Pauper" leaves off.

Grey. I also hope that Twain would be pleased with how I render Tom, Edward and Miles Hendon six years later. Besides the characters, I also reference some of the scenes from Twain's tale such as Tom's father's attack of Father Andrew and Tom's shame when he ignores his own mother as he rides to Westminster for the coronation. Again, my wish is that Twain would feel I did his work justice while telling my own story.

Did the plot of the story change and develop as you wrote it or did you know going into the project exactly the story you wanted to tell about these characters?

In the writing world, folks often describe themselves as plotters, who outline everything, or pantsers, who go by the seat of their pants. I describe myself as a plantser. I know where I'm going, but I don't exactly know how I'll get there. For example, I knew up front that Tom would be telling the tale years later to someone I refer to as "my lady," however, I didn't decide who my lady was until about two-thirds of the way through the first draft.

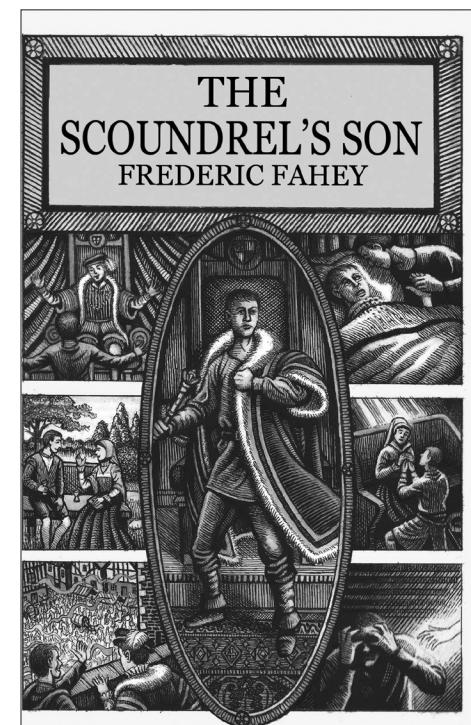
Which character or scene did you enjoy writing about the most?

Besides the characters from history and Twain, I'm pleased with

the characters from my own imagination. In particular, I'm proud of Aly Brown, Tom's best friend from his parish of Offal Court. She can run faster than anyone, loves to climb and is not afraid to punch a boy in the nose if he deserves it. Besides the fact that they're both very bright, she's the opposite of Lady Jane who would rather read a book than go hunting with her parents. Either in spite of or because of this, she becomes Tom's confidant in Part II of the story. I've been touched by how well Aly's been received by readers.

Does this book have any overall theme or message you hope the reader takes away from it?

My novel is a tale of friendship, young love and loyalty set in a time when there was precious little time to come of age. Children were thrust into adulthood without much fanfare. I named my work "The Scoundrel's Son" as that is the legacy Tom so wants to leave behind. He strives



to be a good man and not a scoundrel like his father. And yet, he must face trials and tragedies that are "more than a young man should have to bear," as Tom says in the work's very first line. Still, Tom finds the grace to face all that is laid before him.

Can you tell us a little about the artwork inside and on the cover of "The Scoundrel's Son"?

When I signed with Goose River Press, it was clear that I was responsible for the cover. Fortunately, I live on Peaks Island, the home of many wonderful artists and illustrators. I turned to my good friend and neighbor, Scott Nash, who agreed to serve as art director and designer. After we discussed my story, he suggested a design that combined the portrait style of the Tudor era with the color schemes of the political cartoons of Twain's time. We decided Doug Smith, another Peaks Islander, was the best choice for the illustration. After a few iterations, a final cover drawing was completed to which Doug and Scott added color. I'd also like to recognize my very favorite artist, my wife Chris, who provided the interior art for the project.

"The Scoundrel's Son" is available from Amazon (including Kindle) or www.fredericfahey.com.



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