

## Lure of Alaska plays big role in Texas author's debut novel

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**FAIRBANKS** — A Texas author's debut novel is creating buzz as big as the Lone Star State, and he owes it all to something even bigger — Alaska.

Philip Chavanne's debut work, "The Early Tales of Snow and Oakham," is a global tale of adventure, redemption, growth and change that takes two boys on the journey of their lives in search of their birthright with their adopted father. The novel begins and ends in Alaska, where Chavanne has set the fictional orphanage Tenpenny, and the state is woven throughout the book and the travels of brothers Henry Snow and Jack Oakham.

"I don't know what book I read or what movie I saw, but I had a desire to see Alaska and at 19 I got a flight voucher and pushed two friends to go to Alaska for three weeks," Chavanne said by phone from his home at Selah Springs Ranch in Brady, Texas. "We drove as far as we could go and bought fishing licenses and lived on fish and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. We drove as much as we could and as far as we could."

It was Chavanne's first taste of Alaska, and those 24 days he and his buddies spent here stuck with him. In the next four years, Chavanne visited several times, he said, and traveled the state while writing short fiction at the same time. "A lot of the passion I have for the outdoors, Alaska did that," he said. "It was the jumping off point for my writing."

It wasn't just his ample time in Alaska that formed the basis for "Snow and Oakham." As Chavanne traveled the globe in his 20s, he would write stories about the places he visited — Africa, India, Europe — amassing a collection of about 40 short works. While reflecting on his short stories at his ranch and organizing them into a relatable unit, he realized about 30 of those were a cohesive tale that formed the skeleton of the novel.

"The Alaska adventure is 80 percent of the book," Chavanne said, "and you get a whole lot of the adventure in Alaska."

The tale itself is led by Tip Holland, the adoptive father of Henry and Jack, and the story is as much about changes within Tip as it is changes within the boys. "There are moments when it feels western," Chavanne said. "It's character driven, it's adventure but it's hope. It's a redemption story of a man who starts off so crummy and then turns into the man I'd like to be."

The novel is drawing early buzz in the literary world, so much that it's caught the attention of Hollywood. It was Chavanne's prose in "Snow and Oakham" that caught the attention of film producer Jack Hafer, president of Boulevard Pictures.

"I can see this tale easily translating to film, miniseries or even a TV series," he said in a statement about the novel. "The multicultural characters and timelessness would instantly connect with a worldwide audience. Chavanne has done a terrific job creating an adventure ride where actions have consequences, choices matter and forgiveness reigns. When you finish, you want more."

Chavanne said he doesn't mind the Hollywood aspect, and if the book developed into a TV or film project, he'd hope it would stay as true to the novel as possible. "If it didn't stray too far from the heart of the book, I'd be honored. I think it's a story worth hearing."

Readers will get to hear a little more from Chavanne and the boys Snow and Oakham. He's already working on a sequel and is the subject of an interview with July/August issue of Alaska magazine that publishes this month.

"I really wanted to honor the spirit of Alaska, the independence and strength of the people there, and I based lots of characters on Alaskans I met," he said. "It's a very American place in an old school way, and I wanted to highlight the freedom of it. I wanted to capture that."

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