

Author with local ties publishes novel

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For four years, Thomas Ray Crowel wrote in his Lake Latonka house with a pencil and paper to create “Scattered Harvest,” a story set in rural Indiana in the 1900s.

inet marked “Mentals.”

Crowel began six years of research that led him on a journey into different mental health facilities throughout the Midwest. He discovered his grandfather was wrongfully incarcerated in a mental health facility in Indiana.

When he traveled to the facility, he told the attendant from the facility, “I can’t believe this place still exists.”

Crowel added, “I felt creepy, you know, since my grandfather was there.”

Crowel’s research for the

book led him to small towns in rural Indiana. He talked to the people who still remembered life in the early 1900s, people in their 80s or 90s, to get their stories. He took the kind of life they described from the 1900s and wove it together with his family’s history when he wrote “Scattered Harvest.”

The story centers around the story of Crowel’s grandfather. Like the Will Krouse character in his novel, Crowel’s grandfather lost his home, his farm, and his family when he was wrongfully committed to an asylum. Crowel’s father and his three brothers were split up. His grandmother died of tuberculosis. Crowel was born in Gary where his father ended up.

After those facts, Crowel’s imagination lends to the rest of the story crafted in “Scattered Harvest.” His rich characters capture the essence of early Indiana life. “These characters are alive in my head; they’re alive,” said Crowel.

He said when he was writing the novel, he would ask himself, “I wonder what Prudy and Rudy [characters in the book] are doing today?” before he picked up a pencil.

Though the book was

inspired from the real events of his family’s past, it’s not a history of the Crowel family. He wrote a novel to capture a time in America before World War I and to expose the abuse and corruption of the mental health system in early America.

“It’s not as much a history of my family... as much as it’s a history of family before World War I,” Crowel said.

Crowel also wanted to show people who live in metropolitan areas what life in early, rural Indiana was like.

While Crowel has asked the exact location and specific details of his grandfather and his family to remain private, the details revealed in the book paint a vivid picture of his grandfather’s farm in the early 1900s. Even today, the farm is still standing.

“When you read this book, you will know exactly where you are at,” Crowel said.

Readers near his grandfather’s old farm will be able to identify with the story and details. But so will readers across the Midwest with their own families’ histories.

“Scattered Harvest” will be available just in time for holiday shopping on Nov. 27. He recently completed a screenplay for the book and has hopes that it will be turned into a movie.