

An undiscovered talent

Two novels by local teacher and writer Neil Hummasti published years after his death

By ERICK BENDEL
COAST WEEKEND

Neil Hummasti, a popular language arts teacher in North Coast schools, died of pancreatic cancer in 2011. He taught in the Warrenton and Jewell School districts, and substituted in Astoria and throughout Clatsop County. For years, he coached boy's baseball.

He was also a prolific Northwest writer who left behind three unpublished novels and two full-length non-fiction books — a trove that fell into the hands of his last living sibling, Arnie Hummasti. (Their older brother, George Hummasti, also died of pancreatic cancer a year before Neil's passing.)

Neil never let his friends and family know what he wanted to happen with his writings after his death.

"I sat on the thought of what to do with them for a number of years," Arnie said. Aware it would be daunting to break into the publishing field, he decided to publish his brother's works himself.

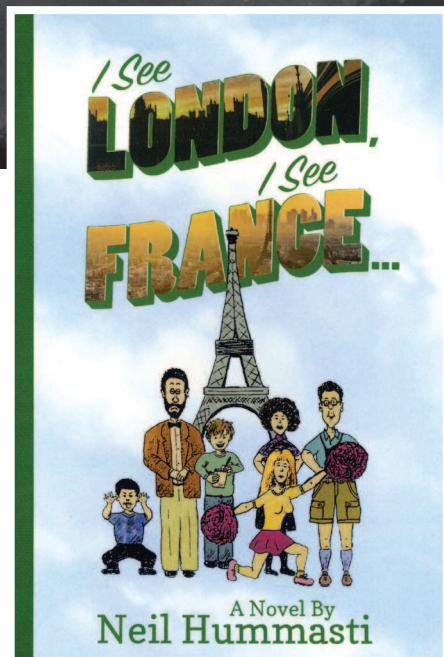
Last year, Arnie, an Astoria resident now living in Neil's old house, formed Svensen Pioneer Press to print two of Neil's novels — a comedy completed in the early 1990s, and a serious, semi-autobiographical story written in the 2000s.

The first novel, "I See London, I See France..." is about a boy genius whose family gets embroiled in a smuggling caper while hopping around Europe. That book, Arnie said, nearly got the green light, but a would-be publisher apparently discovered that a rival company was releasing a similar book and decided to pull out.

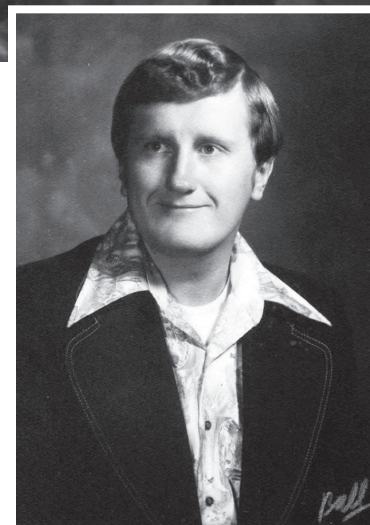
The second novel, "Forty Ways to Square a Circle," is the tale of a language arts teacher looking after an aunt in the throes of dementia. Meanwhile, the protagonist reckons with the coming of computers and internet technology to a school system that is simultaneously undercutting the humanities. It is set in



Arnie Hummasti
A young Neil Hummasti plays the guitar, much like the protagonist of his novel 'Forty Ways to Square a Circle.'

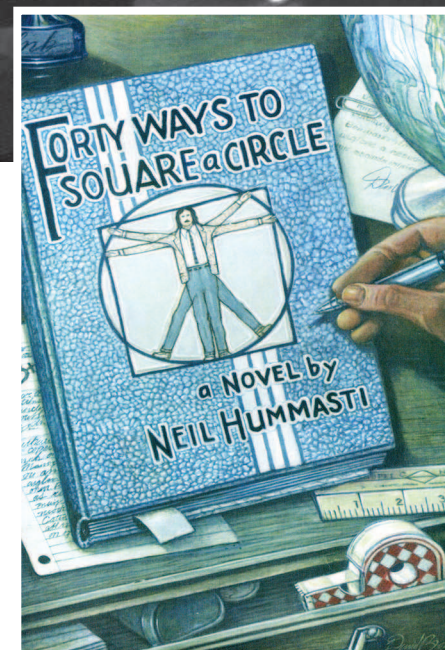


Svensen Pioneer Press
The cover of 'I See London, I See France...,' a comic novel by Neil Hummasti.



Arnie Hummasti

The photo of Neil Hummasti, taken in the 1970s, featured in the back of his books.



Svensen Pioneer Press
The cover art of Neil Hummasti's 'Forty Ways to Square a Circle,' drawn by Dave McMacken.