

Author's novel on local mining history

'Warm Gold' sales proceeds will benefit fire victims

By Cheryl Hoefler
Blue Mountain Eagle

KUNA, Idaho – Routine school days, Friday nights on the football field and outings to restaurants have all become more than just cherished memories for Samuel Cronin.

Cronin has worked those experiences growing up in Grant County, plus his interest in local mining history, into his new novel, "Warm Gold," a tale centered on Grant County's rich gold mining history of the 1890s.

The novel, which is his second published work, took him over four years to write, and involved research at several sites, including local museums and mines. Some of what he learned, such as the Canyon City fire of 1898, struck a chord with Cronin, in light of the recent Canyon Creek Complex fire, and compelled him to donate 30 percent of the sales of the book to assist families impacted by the fire.

The Eagle talked with Cronin about his books, writing and growing up in Grant County.

Eagle: How did you get interested in writing? Did you toy around with it when you were younger, or is this a recent pursuit?

Samuel: When I was a senior at Grant Union, I convinced the principal and my English teacher to give me a free period so I could write my novel. They granted my request, and as graduation approached, I would sneak away by the football field to write. I didn't get very far with that story, however, but it certainly planted a seed.

Later, after I graduated from Oregon State University with a bachelors in English, I went on an adventure, leaving John Day early one Monday morning in my Ford Ranger, and arriving in Camden, Maine, three days later. That summer I worked as a deckhand on a schooner. That experience formed the basis for my first novel, which I would write off-and-on for more than a decade – tinkering with screenplays, drafts of other novels, intermittently.

Eagle: What do you enjoy most about writing?

Samuel: For me, writing is a mode of communication that I find nourishing, because it helps me try to understand people and their worlds, how complicated life is, how rewarding it is to be alive, hopefully lifting and being lifted through the journey of a good story.

Eagle: Have you written any other books, or is this your first?

Samuel: I've published "How Well the Sailors Run," the story of the prodigal son, retold as a sea adventure, based on my experiences aboard Schooner Roseway in Camden. I've also written two feature-length screenplays that are waiting to catch the eye of an agent or film company, and drafts of various other projects I hope to finish at a later date. I sat down at my desk to devote my full attention to "Warm Gold" shortly after I married Christie. That was four

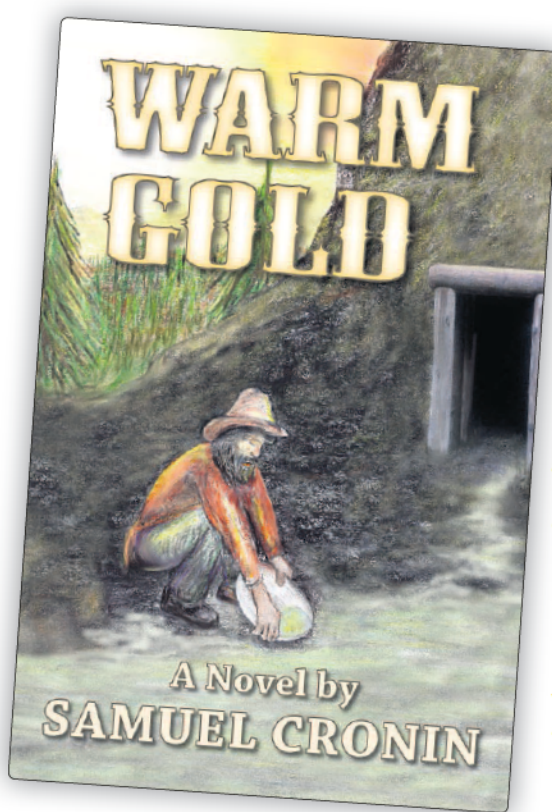
years ago. I'm thankful how the journey has humbled me. "Warm Gold" is not the first story I've written, but it is the story that has been with me from my youth. I have rich memories from growing up as a Prospector in John Day and Canyon City, and so I've enjoyed sharing that richness in this novel.

Eagle: Do you have more story ideas in mind for future books?

Samuel: With "How Well the Sailors Run" and "Warm Gold" now published, and while I have time, I'm planning ahead to my next two projects, which I hope to be ready next year for readers. The first is a story about a husband who loses his only chance at making it to the Professional Golfers Association because his wife, who is his caddy, committed a rule breach, which disqualified him; she was having a miscarriage at the time. To recover from her depression, she takes up the game and eventually makes it to the Ladies PGA. He agrees to caddy for her. The latter project is a story about a grandfather who is so disgusted by the materialism of Christmas that he shuns his entire family during their Christmas Eve traditions. When he loses them all to a violent tomado, he copes with his loss by opening their presents.

Eagle: What compelled or inspired you to write "Warm Gold"?

Samuel: This story resonates with me because of the towns I grew up in. My family moved to Canyon City in the early '80s, and then to John Day. I attended Humbolt Elementary – named after the Humbolt Mine, a placer mine on the hill behind it – and Grant Union High School – home of the Prospectors. The mystique and lore of the hills sang to me as I explored old mines with my friends and viewed the gold nuggets from a true-life prospector, probing him if there was still gold in the hills.



'Warm Gold,' a novel based on Grant County mining history, is the latest work by author Samuel Cronin.

He always said there was.

It seemed to me then, as it seems to me now, that there is an uncommon wealth in Canyon City and in the county at large. From the initial gold find in Canyon Creek on June 8, 1862, the town has survived no less than four infemo-like fires – the fourth being the Canyon Creek Complex Fire – depressions, loss of mills, violence, floods and so forth. The resilience of this people holds on, however painful or hopeless, believing they'll make it through. There is a treasure here. I experienced it in the people I knew from my youth, and in the people who live here now. A deepening treasure – in this beautiful country, and in the people themselves.

Honestly, I don't truly know how or why I wrote this novel, only that it was planted in me from the very people whom I long to make alive, people we cannot ever forget, the truth in them that resonates with us now. I hope I have been a good steward of that story.

Eagle: What memories or experiences from growing up in

Grant County did you draw on for the novel?

Samuel: Eating at places like the Motherlode, where you could order a cinnamon roll so large it covered your entire plate; or the Grizzly Bear, where you sat in a booth named for one of the mining towns, and where you ordered pizza like the Claim Jumper (my brother's favorite, very spicy); and the Grub Steak, with its giant wood-carved statue of a prospector; The Outpost with its warm fire; the Snaffle Bit with its rich intimacy. One of the imaginary taverns that I created in "Warm Gold" is inspired by all of these restaurants, and especially The Snaffle Bit. The warmth I felt when eating at those restaurants with friends and family helped stir in me a warmth for this community, for its history. That warmth is renewed in me whenever I return to the area.

On Friday nights the main entertainment was to go with

my buddies to the Grant Union Prospector football games. The logo of the school, the logo of our history of the miner holding his pick was on helmets and on uniforms and on the school itself. I saw it everywhere I went. I wore the logo when I suited up to play football, basketball or baseball. I am a Prospector. That identity of living as a Prospector has become something more to me – not just ink on a resume, but a connection to a place far bigger than me. I have to explore it. "Warm Gold" is my feeble attempt at trying to understand this story in Grant County, so rich it is overwhelming to me.

Eagle: Why did you decide to donate proceeds from sales of "Warm Gold" to Canyon Creek complex fire victims?

Samuel: I am speechless by the destruction of the Canyon Creek Complex Fire. My parents and family drove up the canyon to Starr Ridge over Labor Day weekend, surveying the damage. It is apocalyptic. This novel is my small attempt at alleviating the harm experienced by those who have lost so much from the fire. I know it is not enough.

Eagle: Do you do any other types of writing?

Samuel: My hopes and dreams are to write many more

novels and short stories, more screenplays, poems, even dabble a little in a play or two and some nonfiction. At heart, I'd just like to tell stories – stories that lift, encourage and strengthen.

Eagle: Do you have any other interests or hobbies?

Samuel: I like to golf. What I like about golf is that one can have a very bad round and still enjoy the outing. Especially with friends and family. I love to read. And go on dates with my wife. After a hectic week in the schools, we often like to unwind with dinner and a movie. We also enjoy traveling and hope to one day travel to New York.

Eagle: Where can people buy your books?

Samuel: Both "Warm Gold" and "How Well the Sailors Run" are available in paperback at Amazon, and in ebook format through Amazon, Nook and Smashwords.

Samuel Cronin graduated from Grant Union High School in 1994, and has degrees in English from Oregon State University, and education from Eastern Oregon University.

He and his wife Christie live in Idaho, where he teaches special education at the high-school level. His parents, Dan and Chris Cronin, live in John Day.



Samuel Cronin



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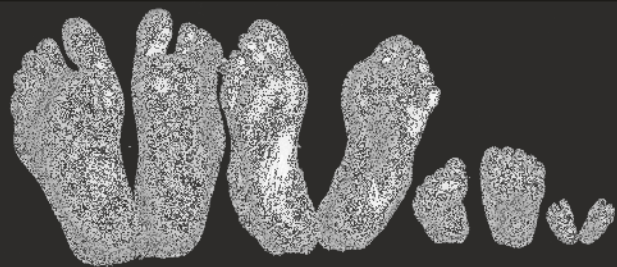
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MON-THURS 7:00

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An astronaut stranded on Mars is presumed dead and must find a way to signal to Earth that he's alive.
FRI & SAT (3:30) 6:30 9:30
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The Blue Mountain Eagle is working to create a master list of non-profits in Grant County. We are looking for the NAME of the non-profit, CONTACT PHONE NUMBER, EMAIL ADDRESS, and WEB SITE if available to be added to, or updated on the list for this year's Grant County Giving Back section, coming out in October.

Either call the information into the Eagle Office at 541-575-0710 or email kristina@bmeagle.com

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