

FEATURED WRITER: Keith Scribner '80

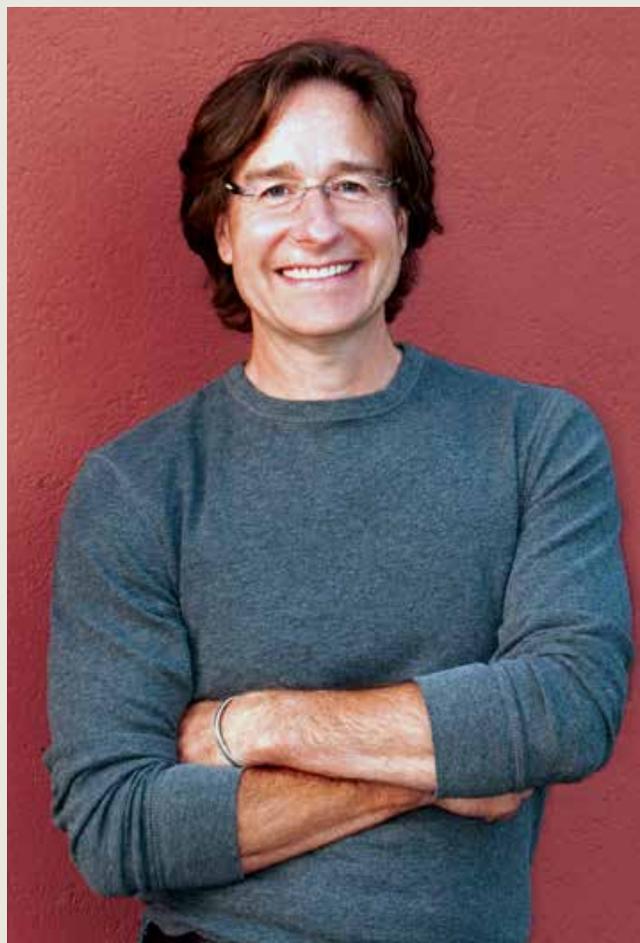
“**I**N all my novels, social class, the American Dream, and a sometimes dark humor keep rising to the surface,” notes Keith Scribner '80. His three novels to date — *The GoodLife* (1999), *Miracle Girl* (2003), and *The Oregon Experiment* (2011) — have earned him considerable critical praise and a growing readership admiring of the subtlety of his observations, his skill at building tension over long arcs, his deft handling of unexpected narrative twists, and his integration of contemporary political and social issues into the fabric of his examination of individual lives.

Narrated from five different points of view, Keith's debut novel, *The GoodLife*, is based on the true story of the kidnapping of an Exxon executive in suburban New Jersey. Named a New York Times Notable Book of the Year, the novel also was selected for the Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers series. “The drama, we realize, is not simply about the kidnapping ... but how one marriage strangely destroys another, how a father's belief in his son endures naively for decades and how economic defeat pushes people through despair into savagery.” (New York Times Book Review)

Keith's second novel, *Miracle Girl*, presents unusual events in upstate New York, where a beautiful Vietnamese-American girl seems to have healing powers, inspiring hopeful pilgrims and a miracle mania — and

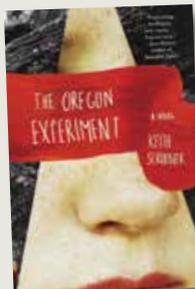
affecting the disintegrating life of miracle doubter John Fitzgerald Kennedy Quinn. “Keith Scribner's fascinating novel ... explores how greed can compromise men of (supposed) faith. John Quinn is one such man who reconnects with his faith — not just the kind that religion provides but also a deeper belief in himself, in others, and in the power of love to transform individual lives.” (Washington Post Book World)

In his latest novel, *The Oregon Experiment*, Keith presents an intense narrative focusing on Scanlon and Naomi Pratt, transplanted Easterners in a college town in Oregon, whose lives become enmeshed with a number of Northwest secessionists and anarchists. Scanlon is an academic who studies radical movements, and Naomi is a “nose,” a professional scent designer who has lost and regained her acute sense of smell. The couple's entanglements with Sequoia, a voluptuous secessionist, and Clay, a psychologically wounded anarchist, propel them into deeper and deeper danger. Daniel Stolar (*The Rumpus*, August 2, 2011) writes: “In many ways, *The Oregon Experiment* belongs in the same class of modern social realism as Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* and *Freedom*. It is a hugely ambitious, decidedly modern, distinctly American novel, with complicated family dynamics, and remarkable depth of character and psychological nuance.”



Keith Scribner '80

Photo: Shannon Bedford



Keith speaks of a common thread in his three novels: “In *The GoodLife*, I was interested in the ways in which the American Dream can produce a sense of entitlement in characters who think they've played by the rules. In *Miracle Girl*, I was interested in exploring the relationship between the American Dream and religion in this country — and our foreign policy, often our failed foreign

policy. In *The Oregon Experiment*, I've returned to some of those same themes again, and I'd say primarily what I'm exploring is the ways in which certain characters are shut out of the American Dream.”

Keith received his bachelor's degree from Vassar College and a master of fine arts degree from the University of Montana. He was awarded Wallace Stegner and John L'Heureux



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”

—Keith Scribner

Fellowships in Fiction at Stanford University, where he went on to teach in the Creative Writing Program as a Jones Lecturer. He currently teaches in the master of fine arts program at Oregon State University, and lives in Corvallis with his wife, the poet Jennifer Richter, and their children.

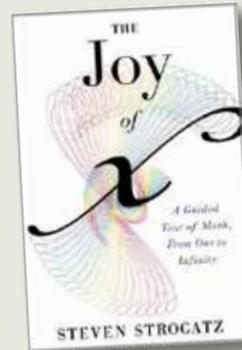
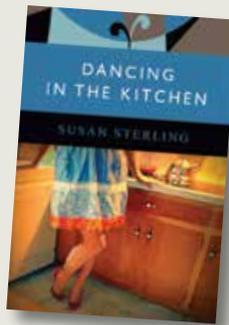
Keith's fiction and nonfiction have appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *The Daily Beast*, *Five Chapters*, *TriQuarterly*, *American Short Fiction*, *Quarterly West*, *The North Atlantic Review*, *The San Jose Mercury News*, *The Baltimore Sun*, and the anthologies *Flash*

Fiction Forward (W.W. Norton) and *Sudden Stories: The MAMMOTH Book of Miniscule Fiction*. He received both Pushcart and O. Henry Prize Honorable Mentions for his short story “Paradise in a Cup” (*TriQuarterly*, #121).

Keith finds that his teaching informs his writing: “Teaching has always been very stimulating to me. I get to see what young people are writing about — their concerns, fears, obsessions, aesthetics — and what they're reading. Until I first taught creative writing at Stanford, I never articulated basic ideas of storytelling and craft that were shaping my work on a gut level. Working with my graduate students — many of whom are writing novels — I'm always learning about fictional technique as I see what's riveting in their drafts, and what falls flat.”

At work on his fourth novel, Keith reveals that it contains two narratives, one contemporary and one in the late 1970s, and is set both in Oregon and in the Connecticut River valley. He adds, “My four years at Loomis Chaffee were profoundly influential on who I've become as a person, as a writer — my whole world view, really.

Like most writers, I'm a little too obsessed with my own past, so many of the friends and acquaintances I had at Loomis Chaffee — even those I haven't spoken with since graduation — remain present and powerfully alive in me. Which is to say, there's a Loomis Chaffee novel coming some time. Maybe number five.”



Books by Alumni Authors Recently Published or Recently Added to the School's Master List

A more complete list of books by Loomis Chaffee authors can be found on the school website. The editors ask alumni to send updates and corrections to magazine@loomis.org.

JL.H. Knickerbocker '54
Jockey on a Crocodile:
A Memoir — Almost

E. B. Boatner '59
M-O-T-H-E-R Spells Murder

Gahan Hanmer '61
The Kingdom on the Edge
of Reality

Susan Sterling '64
Dancing in the Kitchen

Michael Bogdasarian '65
The American Civil War:
A Lecture Series

David Margolick '70
Dreadful: The Short Life and Gay
Times of John Horne Burns

Morwen (Swilling) Two Feathers '74
Universal Heartbeat: Drumming,
Spirit and Community

John Backman '75
Why Can't We Talk?:
Christian Wisdom on Dialogue
as a Habit of the Heart

Anthony Wade Florence '76
Listen Closely: The History
of a True Story

David Pratt '76
My Movie (short stories)

Adam Rome '76
The Genius of Earth Day:
How a 1970 Teach-In
Unexpectedly Made the First
Green Generation

Steven Strogatz '76
The Joy of x: A Guided Tour of
Math, from One to Infinity

Deborah Baker '77
The Convert: A Tale of Exile
and Extremism

Thomas A. Foster '87, editor
Documenting Intimate Matters:
Primary Sources for a History of
Sexuality in America

Jeanne (McLeod) McNaney '87
The Legend of Honey Hollow
Miracle in Sumatra: The Story
of Gutsy Gus

Cathryn Prince '87
Death in the Baltic: The World War
II Sinking of the Wilhelm Gustloff

Alexandra Socarides '92
Dickinson Unbound: Paper,
Process, Poetics

Jessica Grogan '94
Encountering America: Humanistic
Psychology, Sixties Culture &
The Shaping of the Modern Self

Samuel Amadon '98
The Hartford Book (poetry)

Chris Vola '03
Monkeytown

