

BookScene

Secrets, lies and fake identities Disgraced journalist seeks redemption in new memoir

By **ANDREW KRAMER**
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Michael Finkel was in the grip of despair in February 2002, fired from his job at The New York Times Magazine for writing a story about slavery in West Africa based on a composite character.



In this undated photo provided by the author, writer Michael Finkel stands on dirt road in Bozeman, Mont.

Little did Finkel know that his life was again about to change because of American fugitive Christian Longo, wanted for killing his wife and three young children in Oregon. Longo was tracked down in January 2002 in Mexico, where he was arrested and returned to Oregon.

While in Mexico, Longo, who had often read Finkel's stories, assumed the former journalist's identity. The real Finkel heard about the identity theft when a reporter called to interview him.

Finkel quickly sensed that exploring this bizarre coincidence might salvage his career. Shortly after Longo's capture, Finkel asked to meet with the accused murderer, now on Death Row at the Oregon State Penitentiary in Salem.

Mea Culpa," a strange tale of his search for redemption. The book has dramatically reversed his fortunes.

"At the same time that you were using my name, I lost my own — my firing, as I mentioned, was very public," Finkel writes. "Now that I'm out of a job, I am sort of seeking to find out who I really am."

True Story" was met with positive reviews but unforgiving attacks on the author's professionalism. The New York Ob-

The intersection of these two lives is the basis of Finkel's "True Story: Murder, Memoir,

server called it a "riveting read," while **Salon.com** called Finkel's willingness to befriend a murderer to save his career worse than the original lie.

The New York Times shrugged off the book as insincere.

Other disgraced journalists have written memoirs, notably Stephen Glass, fired by the New Republic in 1998 for fabricating stories, and Jayson Blair, who resigned from the Times in 2003 amid accusations of plagiarism and fraud. Both books tanked.

But publisher HarperCollins never intended to market the book as a memoir by a fallen journalist. "The fact that he is a defrocked journalist is not an asset we can market," David Hirshey, senior vice president and executive editor, said. "What we were selling was an extraordinary work of narrative nonfiction."

Finkel insisted that everything in his book is factual. "This has been scrupulously fact checked," he said.

Longo's co-defense attorney, Steven Krasik, said he read the book and found no contradictions with facts that emerged at trial. Longo pleaded guilty to killing his wife and 2-year-old daughter, Madison. A jury convicted him of killing Zachery, 4, and Sadie, 3.

"True Story" parallels Finkel's and Longo's lives, blending a reporter's work with a grim ac-

count of murder on the rugged Oregon coastline. And Finkel said they shared a few "personality traits" — inflated ego and trouble telling the truth.

While unraveling Longo's lies, Finkel admits a few of his own. He said he lied about everything, from claiming to have a younger brother who died to an ability to speak foreign languages and play instruments.

A clean-cut, one-time church-going 28-year-old, Longo was accused of suffocating MaryJane, 34, and the children, stuffing their bodies in suitcases and sleeping bags and throwing them into shallow ocean inlets before going to work the following day to an office pizza party.

As the real Finkel's career was imploding, Longo as Finkel was enjoying the fantasy of "reporting" an article on Mayan spiritualism for the Times, bringing along his photographer girlfriend. Later, Longo wrote to Finkel: "I sat there halfheartedly daydreaming of what the real life of Michael Finkel must be like."

Finkel acknowledges that his relationship with the murderer "was one big moral quagmire." He grew to hate Longo after learning of his guilt, and cut off most contact.

But he'd like to hear from Longo again — for one reason: "I'm anxious for his review of the book."



Elizabeth Curtis (left) Booker Gillespie and Lisa Stefanic prepare for their "Loesser Music" program, which is part of "Music Sandwiched In." All library programs are free and open to the public.

Library tunes up for music series

reading
AT THE LIBRARY

What's music if it's not a good time? Feel free to dance and laugh along each Wednesday in September as "Music Sandwiched In" presents Just for Fun, in Central Library's Aaronson Auditorium, Fourth Street and Denver Avenue, 12:10-12:10 p.m.

The series begins Sept. 7 with "Witty, Wacky Songs." Susan Swatek, Wayne Hardy and Betty Moses run the musical gamut from the silly to the sophisticated as they perform songs by Tom Lehrer, Noel Coward, Flinders and Swan, and Kander and Ebb. Selections include "Mad Dogs and Englishmen," "Hippopotamus Song" and "Wiener Schnitzel Waltz."

"Olio Night" is in the spotlight Sept. 14. Spotlight Theatre presents this tasty confection of highly entertaining variety acts. Enjoy singers James Van Pelt, Sheila Alley, the Pendleton Family Fiddlers, and Wilma Cummins and her amazing musical bottles.

Step back to the wonder years with "Children's Games" Sept. 21. Pianists Alice Brook and Betty Moses join narrator Edward Dumit in this charming combi-

nation of music and poetry. This amusing and nostalgic presentation features musical illustrations of children's games with delightful music by Georges Bizet and humorous poetry by Wayne Hardy.

The series concludes Sept. 28 with "Loesser Music." Loesser is definitely more in this performance of music by the legendary Broadway composer Frank Loesser. Tunes from "Guys and Dolls," "How to Succeed in Business" and "Hans Christian Andersen" are performed by Elizabeth Curtis, Lisa Stefanic and Booker Gillespie and accompanied by Terri Graves.

Music Sandwiched In is sponsored by the Friends of the Tulsa City-County Libraries and Central Library's Media Center. Sandwiches and coffee are available at the door.

For more information on library programming, call the AskUs Hotline, 596-7977 or visit the library's Web site, www.tulsa-library.com.

Football dream conjures 'Sooner Magic'

By **SCOTT M. CHILDERS**

It was Barry Switzer who coined the term in the mid-'70s. The Oklahoma Sooners' miracle comeback win in the fourth quarter over the Nebraska Cornhuskers in 1976 was the catalyst that inspired Switzer to create the term "Sooner Magic" in describing how his team accomplished such a turnaround.

"Sooner Magic" reminds nearly everyone even remotely familiar with college football that anything can happen. Author D. Mikels takes the mythical term to a new level in his novel "Walk-On," (Xlibris, \$22.99)

The story centers on two cousins, who could not be more diverse. Mike Wilson is a middle-aged father of two living in rural Oklahoma. Justin Chastain is a 19-year-old who lives in the inner-city slums of Oklahoma City.

Mike seems to have it all, a beautiful wife, two young daughters and a successful insurance business, but he lives in the past. As a high school football player, his football career consisted of playing three games in place of an injured teammate and leading his team into the playoffs. It is not enough for Mike, who still lives in regret some 20 years later.

Justin lives in an entirely different world. His father abandoned him, his mother is a drug addict and he works part-time at a fast food restaurant. Although blessed with a large frame and muscular body, his hidden athletic potential was left untapped.

Mike and Justin seem to be on different paths until fate steps in. Justin's father returns to kill his mother, before turning the gun on himself. With both parents dead, Justin turns

to his cousin Mike, whom he has not seen for almost 15 years. Without hesitation, Mike agrees to take in Justin.

Just as Justin is settling in, a supernatural phenomenon happens. A peculiar storm, the likes of which no one has ever seen, races through town. In the days immediately following, Justin and Mike notice that something odd has happened. Like a man possessed, Justin begins vigorously working out, while Mike begins lacking self-confidence, withdrawing from both his wife and his work.

Mike's business begins to suffer. Then Justin announces that he plans to enroll at the University of Oklahoma and join the football team as a "walk-on." It is clear that the mystical storm has somehow switched the personas of the two men.

Justin reports to football practice in August and persuades

the coaches to allow him to practice with the team for one day. Now possessing Mike's ferocious football mentality combined with his own large physique, he quickly impresses the staff of the OU football squad. He continues through the pre-season practices, improving his performance with each one. When the Sooners begin the season, Justin has pushed his way onto the team and is an anchor on the special teams.

D. Mikels is a journalism graduate from OU. "Walk-On" is his second novel. It is an entertaining and inspiring story, even for non-football fans.

He reminds readers to never give up on their dreams. Even a seemingly impossible goal is achievable, especially in the land of Sooner Magic.

Scott Childers is a graduate student at OU-Tulsa in the MPA program.

bestsellers

- Publishers Weekly Best Sellers
hardcover fiction
1. The Da Vinci Code. Dan Brown. Doubleday, \$24.95
Last Week: 2; Weeks on List: 125
2. Chill Factor. Sandra Brown. Simon & Schuster, \$25.95
Last Week: -; Weeks on List: 1
3. The Historian. Elizabeth Kos-

- tova. Little, Brown, \$25.95
Last Week: 3; Weeks on List: 10
4. Lifeguard. James Patterson and Andrew Gross. Little, Brown, \$26.95
Last Week: 1; Weeks on List: 6
5. Undomestic Goddess. Sophie Kinsella. Dial, \$23
Last Week: 4; Weeks on List: 5
6. Sweetwater Creek. Anne Rivers Siddons. HarperCollins, \$24.95
Last Week: 8; Weeks on List: 2

our lively LANGUAGE

'O' too low for zero?

By **SALLY BRIGHT**

Why do people say "o" for the numeral "zero"? H.P., Tulsa.

One reason is our love of shortcuts. Imagine the time saved by saying "o" instead of "zero" in telephone discussions involving phone numbers, addresses and credit card numbers. Whatever the reason, usage experts now accept "o."

However, in the world of mathematics, the substitution lays an egg.

People are using "sit" as a noun. C.J., Tulsa.

That's nothing new. In 1776 "sit" described the way one's clothing fit, as in "the sit of a cap." Another example is "Have a sit," which the aristocratic General Washington probably didn't say to Martha, but the invitation could have been common among his soldiers.

I hear people say, "I'm done," and "Are you done?" My mother always chided, "The cake is done; you are finished." S.R., Tulsa.

Grammarians Barbara Wallraff explains that "Nowadays the distinction between the two words is observed more by aunts and grandmothers than by grammarians."

I'm a granny grammarian on your side.

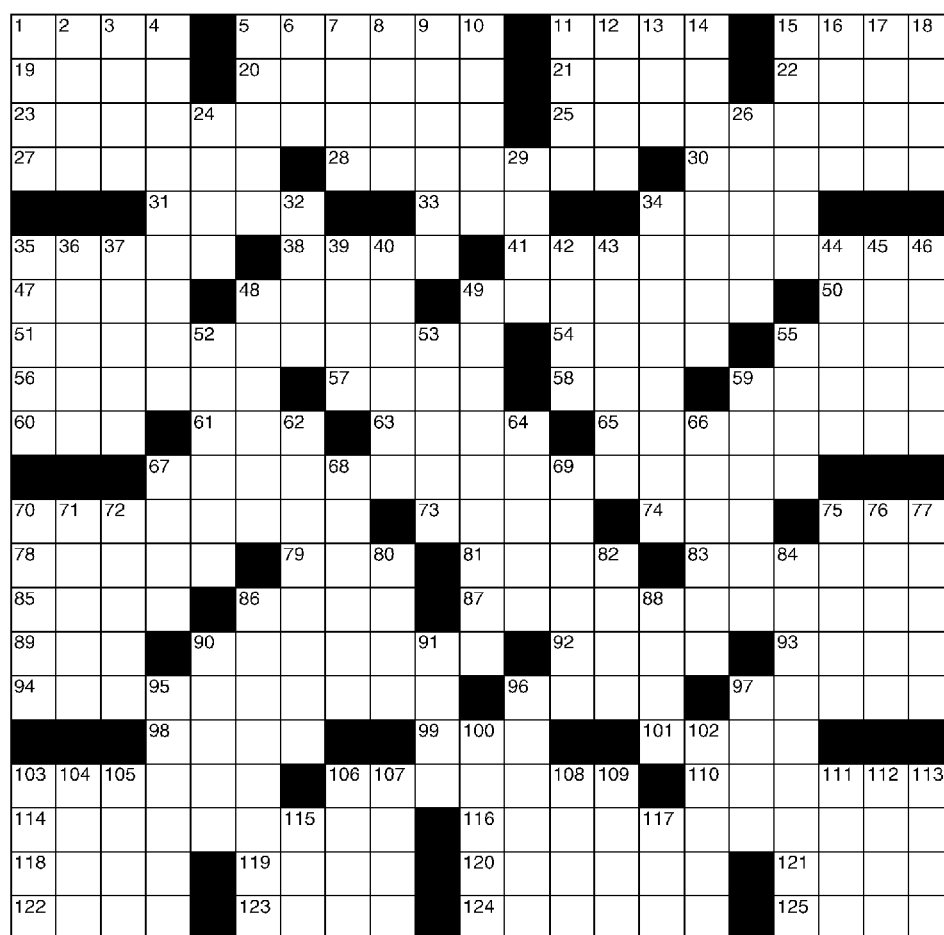
sbright3@cox.net

- ACROSS
- 1 Prison unit
- 5 Trendy
- 11 Radar's silcom
- 15 Oktoberfest order
- 19 Jai — (handball relative)
- 20 Slower than andante
- 21 "Boy" or "girl" lead-in
- 22 Heavenly bear
- 23 Very hard, as rainfall
- 25 Its caterpillars feed on tree foliage
- 27 Priced to go
- 28 Yerevan's land
- 30 Trees yielding light wood
- 31 Essential part
- 33 Picnic drink
- 34 Dried up
- 35 Become parents to
- 38 Basics
- 41 1991 Chris Isaak hit
- 47 Moniker
- 48 Backwoods sibling
- 49 Overtaxes
- 50 "Miss Saigon" setting, briefly
- 51 Theater makeup
- 54 Nile
- 55 Siltherers
- 56 Big brute
- 57 R&B singer
- 58 Mouse clicker
- 58 Jamaican music
- 59 Coil of 92-
- 60 Conductor — Pekka Salonen
- 61 Fall chill
- 63 Pulled tight
- 65 Captivated
- 67 Energizer product
- 70 And so on
- 73 Shelley's alma mater
- 74 Senator
- 75 Actress
- 78 Misty-eyed
- 79 Verizon alternative
- 81 Slaughter of the diamond
- 83 Trig ratio
- 85 Clutched
- 86 Bell's ring
- 87 Government regulation of housing
- 89 Suffix with opal
- 90 Brimless caps
- 92 Knitting need
- 93 Tough-guy actor Ray
- 94 Nightclub
- 96 Hawks' old arena
- 97 Out of bed
- 98 Fully aged
- 99 Guinness's favorite suffix
- 101 — -Pei (wrinkly-skinned dog)
- 103 Squash and pumpkin, e.g.
- 106 Forbidding
- 110 Final result
- 114 Woody Allen
- 116 "Platoon" director
- 118 R-W linkup
- 119 Harbinger
- 120 Least recent
- 121 Flightless birds
- 122 Fleshy fruit
- 123 "That — close one!"
- 124 Red-ink entries
- 125 Noodge
- DOWN
- 1 Texas city
- 2 Actor Aida
- 3 Scoundrels
- 4 Vanish
- 5 Painter
- 6 Eccentric
- 7 Early word for baby
- 8 Helper with a hump
- 9 Fraternity letters
- 10 Soaked, with "down"
- 11 Trio in a Christmas story
- 12 "Back —!" ("Likewise!")
- 13 Brand of motor oil additive
- 14 They're no longer popular
- 15 Cause of a limp, slangily
- 16 God of love
- 17 This, in Toledo
- 18 Arena shouts
- 24 Came to rest
- 26 Sprinkler sites
- 29 Bright salamander
- 32 Angel's strings
- 34 Bottoms for the slopes
- 35 Actress
- 36 Mendis, as argyles
- 37 Big name in watches
- 39 Sweetheart
- 40 "The Count of Monte —"
- 42 S&L offerings
- 43 Coffin
- 44 Wrath
- 45 See 71-Down
- 46 Improve, as text
- 48 Message on a candy heart
- 49 Peacocks, when walking
- 52 Marbles, so to speak
- 53 Novelist
- 54 Zora — Hurston
- 55 Acceptable
- 57 Sunday talk
- 62 Reach every part of
- 64 Steakhouse selection
- 66 Church official
- 67 Uncool character
- 68 Unoccupied
- 69 False name
- 70 Moral standard
- 71 With 45-Down, singer of the
- 76 Positive pole
- 77 Honeydew, e.g.
- 80 Figure skater
- 81 Kulik
- 82 Jazzman
- 83 Getz
- 84 Flight unit
- 86 Bit of risqué viewing
- 88 Carter of the NFL's Vikings
- 90 Rice thrower's target
- 91 Divorced couples
- 95 Get there
- 96 Verdi opera
- 97 Copies
- 99 Coolio
- 100 Bar seat
- 102 Aches
- 103 Huff and puff
- 104 Hip about
- 105 "E pluribus —"
- 106 Tavern drinks
- 107 Forearm bone
- 108 Unburdens
- 109 Preholiday nights
- 111 Abode
- 112 Big burden
- 113 Audition
- 115 Physicians' org.
- 117 Suffix with Siam

8-28 CRYPTOQUIP
CT UPJ'NR BPPECFM TPN IPDRPMR VCAG
VGPD AP QCISJII SGJNSG QPFDZ, SPJBQ
UPJ ZIE, "ARMRIA, ZMUPMR?"

Today's Cryptoquip clue: P equals O

Broadway musical openings



Answers on H-5