

Huntsville's Homer Hickam

The author of *Rocket Boys* continues to write best-sellers in North Alabama.

In author Homer Hickam, Jr.'s skillful hands, virtually every frontier that's known to man—land, sea, and space—has received literary attention.

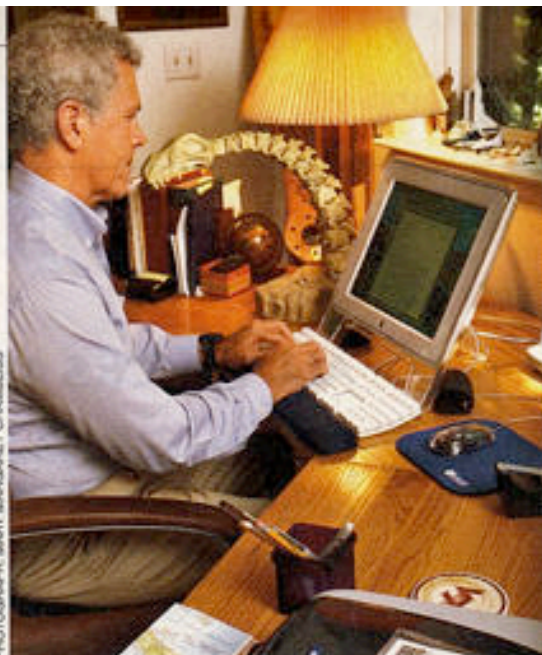
In his best-selling memoirs, *Rocket Boys* (also known as *October Sky*), *The Coalwood Way*, and *Sky of Stone*, he described the subterranean coal mines of West Virginia. In his most recent novel, *The Keeper's Son*, he depicted the sparkling waters of North Carolina's Outer Banks. And in his first novel, *Back to the Moon*, he gave readers an up close perspective of zero gravity in celestial space.

Despite his literary aplomb, Homer

continues to endure indignities usually reserved for those who live in obscurity. Take his often-misspelled name. It's H-i-c-k-a-m, not Hickman, Hiccum, or any other mangled version of the six simple letters. Homer, a junior, also wants to set the record straight about his late father's name—it's Homer, not "John" as the senior Hickam's character is called in the film, *October Sky*.

Residing in Rocket City

In the author's Huntsville study, awards vie for space with models of aircraft and ships, his dad's coal min-



"I can write anywhere," says Homer. "But I do enjoy this room and this house."

ing lantern, and replica dinosaur bones. The mementos speak of a man with many interests. Homer is a decorated Vietnam veteran, a scuba instructor, an amateur paleontologist,

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and a retired aeronautics engineer. But writing remains his first love.

"When I came back from Vietnam, I felt this deep emptiness in my life," he says. "I realized after a while that I needed to write."

Countdown to Fame

Rocket Boys, the real-life story about the rocket-building club formed by Homer and his childhood friends in their West Virginia hometown, caused the public's imagination to soar. In the end, the boys' dream of space wins over the hearts of the town's citizens.

Currently he's at work on the third book in his new fictionalized series. The books center on the character of Coast Guard Capt. Josh Thurlow. The second book, *The Ambassador's Son*, comes out in March. It contains some of the same characters found in the first book, *The Keeper's Son*. Battles at sea, a love story, and humor combine in this novel, set in 1942 on North Carolina's coast.

"Homer continually fights a misconception that his books are 'technical,' or 'about rockets' when they are actually about family and love and dreams," says his wife, Linda, who is also his editorial assistant.

Hallmark Entertainment has optioned *Sky of Stone* for a television production. Linda adds, "There is a lot of interest in Hollywood for *The Keeper's Son* too."

Whether or not movie fame calls again, Homer's life in Alabama probably will remain much the same. "What I like about Huntsville is the people," he says. Then he grins and adds, "Nobody here cares if I am famous or not." The most recognition he gets is an occasional drive-by compliment about his books as he takes his daily jog.

Homer's tickled, of course, when the well-wisher gets his name right. **NANCY DORMAN-HICKSON**

For more information visit www.homerhickam.com.

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