

# Crossing Latitude 38°



## AUTHOR MOVES INTO DIGITAL FRONTIER

**I**t is said that controversy usually sells. But Joplin author Ron Hutchison has found that it can sometimes be a hindrance as well.

Hutchison is the author of "Latitude 38," published April 25, a polemic book set in a dystopian future. In the novel, Adriana finds that her cancer has come back for the third, and most likely final, time... most likely for the last time. She and her husband, Diego, begin to realize the fate she faces, as the doctor tells them that pain medication is too valuable to be used on the terminally ill. Euthanasia is outlawed below Latitude 38, so the two decide to illegally cross the border into the north in order to find a doctor who will aid in taking her life.

It was a premise that scared off the traditional publishing community, which had published Hutchison's previous book, "Santa Fe Crazy," in 1999.

Deeming the content too controversial, Hutchison was turned away by many publishing houses. It was then that his agent directed him to Stay Thirsty Media, a new media company that decided to publish it as an e-book, a format that has seen vast growth with the advent of the Amazon Kindle, the iPad and other e-readers.

"Several brick and mortar publishers said the book was too controversial," says Hutchison. "They did not want to print it. My agent found a fellow that



(Left) Ron Hutchison displays a box of donated books for the Chapters for Children program. Started by his daughter and granddaughter, it is an effort to collect books for kids who lost everything in the May 22 tornado.

(Facing page) Ron Hutchison displays a copy of "Latitude 38" on his Kindle. While passed over by "brick and mortar" publishers, the book found its place as an e-book.

read the story, he liked it and we were off to the races."

Hutchison, who has written many op-ed pieces for the Joplin Globe after returning to Joplin in 2007 to care for his mother, wrote the story after being inspired by his own battles with throat cancer. After undergoing the treatment and subsequent recovery, he decided to put his experience to paper. Opinionated as he is in the newspaper, though, Hutchison took great care to leave politics out of his book, instead inviting readers to formulate their own thoughts on right and wrong on the various issues addressed.

"What I tried to do was to ask questions throughout the novel and allow the reader to draw their own conclusions," he says. "I tried to stay neutral. I don't like to preach to the reader."

While the e-book industry might be fairly new, it is one that is see-

ing vast growth, something that can only help authors like Hutchison. Much like the punk rock scene of the '80s and the independent filmmaker revival of the early '90s, it has also become an alternative for voices from the likes of Hutchison that might have been a little too scary, too cutting edge for other avenues of publication.

"As the e-book industry evolves, I think you're going to find more books perhaps that might be too controversial with mainstream publishers might see the light of day as e-books. Plus, how can you ban an e-book?" says Hutchison.

As the format has become accepted and embraced, it is just as likely you'll see a beachgoer with an e-reader as a traditional book, something that suits Hutchison just fine.

"It's not so much how the story is packaged, it's the content. If you have the right dialogue, the characters and the right story, it doesn't matter the format."

Hutchison also believes in giving back to the community, and as such he is donating \$1 per book sold to the Joplin School District's SNACK program, which provides food for students on the weekends when they might otherwise go hungry. It is a program he feels serves an important role.

"There are almost 400 kids in the Joplin School District who go hungry on the weekends. It's hard to believe that in any town there would be that

many kids that would go hungry on the weekend. It's almost criminal."

Hutchison has also become deeply involved in Chapters for Children, an initiative begun by his daughter and granddaughter to collect and distribute books to those who lost so much in the May 22 tornado. The program is holding distribution events at various locations to get kids back into the swing of reading. Information for the project can be found at the Chapters for Children Facebook page.

With "Latitude 38" now available to readers, Hutchison is turning his attention to other projects. He expects "Santa Fe Crazy" to be published in e-book form this summer, and is hard at work on a young adult novel drawing from his experience as a youth on an Army base in Japan, as well as another book.

As for the secret to finding success in the writing field, Hutchison's advice is simple:

"Write. Write every day. Write something. Write an email, write a letter, write an essay. Just write," he says. "You can't dream about writing. You can't wait for that creative spark. It's not about creativity. It's about sitting down at the same time every day and writing. It's work. There's nothing easy about it." J

"Latitude 38" is available at Amazon.com, and more information can be found on the publisher's website, [www.staythirstymedia.com](http://www.staythirstymedia.com). Hutchison also has a "Latitude 38" Facebook page.