



Grieving man faces threats to his past in novel by local author

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By **Sheila McGrath | Advance Newspapers**

The Rev. Rich Rockwood has been writing for most of his adult life. But as a minister in the Reformed Church in America, most of his writing was devoted to sermons and newsletters.

It wasn't until he was recovering from a tragedy in his own life that he was spurred to write his first novel, *Memory Theft*, which tells the story of a grieving husband caught in an extortion scheme after his wife's death.

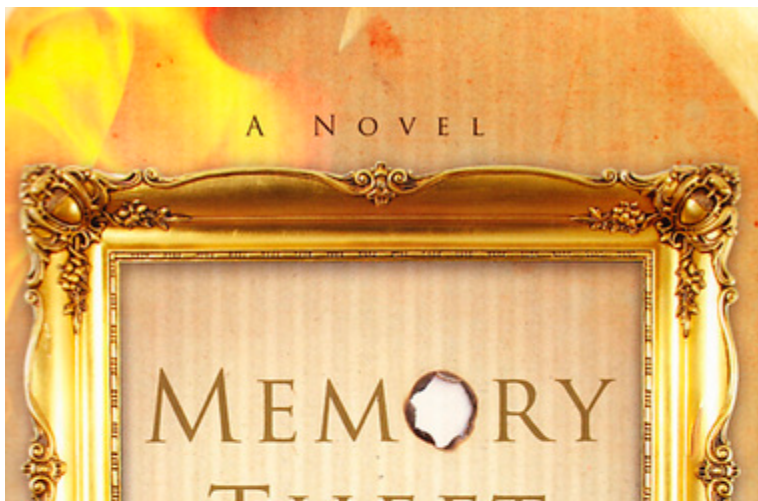
Rockwood, who now lives in the Kentwood area, lived and worked as a minister for 20 years in Saugerties, N.Y. In 2006, while he was still in the ministry, his wife, Inga, died suddenly from a brain aneurysm. She had been complaining of headaches, he said, but that was the only hint they had that something was wrong. She died at the age of 64, two days after they celebrated their 17th anniversary.



RICH ROCKWOOD

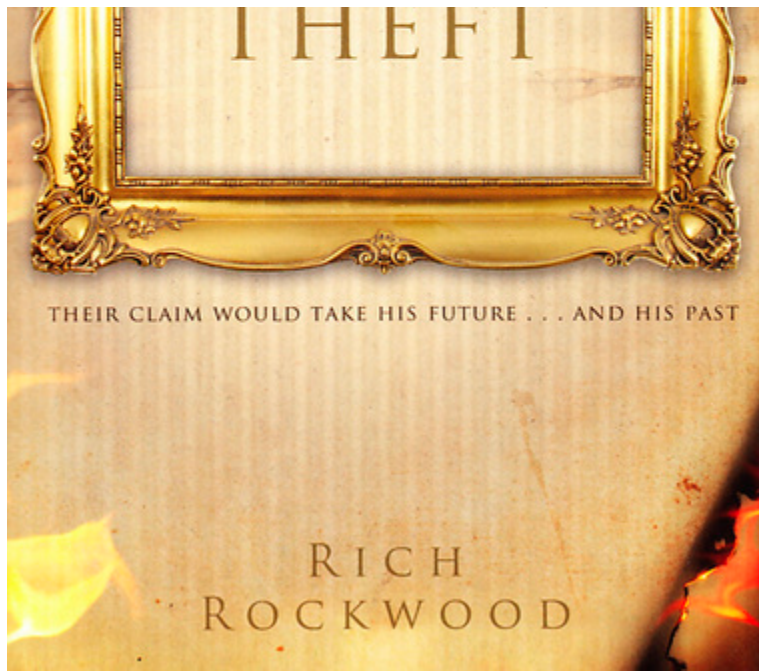
About a year later, Rockwood said, he woke up one morning with a question on his mind: What would he do if someone said something about his late wife's reputation and she was no longer around to defend herself?

"That was the nugget of the book," he said. "Not only have you lost that special person, now someone is alleging wrongdoing."



In the book, the main character starts receiving threatening phone calls and collection notices alleging his wife had amassed a huge gambling debt and he would be responsible for paying it.

In the process of fighting the allegations, fearing for his financial future and searching for the truth, he learns things he hadn't known about his wife, and things he hadn't known about himself.



Rockwood said writing the book was a healing experience for him. On the pages of the book, he could share with readers the crushing anxiety he felt when he would go in certain rooms of his house – rooms he associated most strongly with his wife.

“I could just feel it so strongly it was like I couldn’t breathe,” he said. “Some of the anxiety that shows up in the main character – it felt like I was getting it out by writing about it.”

Memory Theft touches on other subjects Rockwood is familiar with – the characters’ religious faith, how they struggle with it, and

how it makes them stronger.

It also touches on subjects he had less experience with, like financial fraud and casino operations. But most of that research he was able to do online and through Gamblers Anonymous, he said.

The part he found most problematic was accurately portraying the female characters, from their clothing to the way they would interact with each other.

“There was one scene where one is confronting another, and I didn’t know what they would say or do,” he said. “I ran that by a woman writer and she made some suggestions.”

Rockwell returned to Michigan in 2007 after retiring from the full-time ministry. He still preaches occasionally at New Life Reformed Church on 28th Street, and volunteers with the John Knox Food Pantry on Kalamazoo Avenue.

Rockwood remarried in 2010 to his wife, Cindy, who had also experienced a tragic loss in her family. She finished *Memory Theft* in a day and a half, Rockwood said, and others have also told him they couldn’t put the book down.

“I told her, ‘It took me a year to write and you finished it in a day and a half – you should have taken longer.’”

He’s hoping to use *Memory Theft* as a springboard to talk with seniors about the reality of senior scams and how to avoid them. He’s already spoken at a few retirement communities and is hoping to do more of that.

"I've read articles that said there's an alarming amount of money people are being scammed out of," he said.

He's also working on a second novel about a woman who returns to her hometown for a visit and discovers the church she had long attended has been demolished. As she faints from the shock, a story unravels about what happened to the church and why its loss devastated her so deeply.

Memory Theft is available at the 28th Street locations of Schuler Books & Music and Family Christian Stores, and online at winepressbooks.com.

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