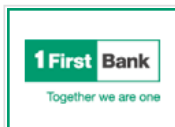


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Author's Visit Inspires Young Writers

BY JOHN BAUR — FEBRUARY 19, 2011



Author Steve Swinburne looks over Rex Cazaubon's opening paragraph while his classmates are lost in their writing.

Like a carpenter building a house, a writer has to have the right tools to build a story, and Friday young students at the Good Hope School got a lesson from a professional author about what they should include in their own tool belts.

Steve Swinburne, a Vermont-based author of more than two dozen books for children visited the Good Hope School to meet with third, fourth and fifth graders.

(No, that's not good enough.

One of Swinburne's rules was to always use strong verbs, verbs that carry impact. Try that sentence again.)

Steve Swinburne, a Vermont-based author of more than two dozen books for children, descended on the Good Hope School to inspire third, fourth and fifth graders.

(Better.)

Strong verbs, interesting details, words that evoke the five senses – How did it look? How did it sound? How did it taste or smell? – are among the most important tools a writer can cram into his tool belt, Swinburne said. And he had the kids testing their skill with those tools in a series of exercises that had them excited and eager to read their work to their classmates.

Swinburne is on St. Croix for two weeks – *(C'mon! Strong verbs! Try again!)* – Swinburne has invaded St Croix for two weeks, hoping to infuse his love of writing in students at public and private schools. The trip is organized by the St. Croix Reading Council.

A tall, silver-haired man with a mobile face that shifts from grin to grimace in the wink of his piercing blue eyes, Swinburne captivated the students gathered in Good Hope's library.

He certainly didn't plan to be a writer when he was growing up, first in London and then in the U.S. where his family moved when he was 8 years old. He said the list of jobs he's held includes dishwasher, pizza deliverer, boat captain, guitarist in a rock band and ranger in the National Park Service. As a ranger he thought he had the best possible job – waking up each morning to patrol miles of beaches, on the lookout for endangered species.

Then in 1994, he said, he found an even better job, one that combined his love of nature with his other passions – writing, photography and travel.

He became a writer. – *(Became? Is that the best you can do?)* – He transformed himself into a writer.

CALENDARS

February						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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Temo's Dream Shocks Favorite in Ag Fair Classic

By all accounts, Temo's Dream has been a disappointment since coming to St. Croix. But all that changed Sunday afternoon.

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Thoroughbred Season Opens with Ag Fair Races

The 2011 thoroughbred racing season gets under way Sunday at the Randall "Doc" Racetrack with the annual Agriculture and Food Fair Races, featuring an eight-races card.

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This Week's Senate Calendar

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- o VI Source
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- o View Flagged Comments
- o Advertiser Pages
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- o Newsletter
- o My account
- o Website Statistics
- o Create content
- o My blog
- o News aggregator
- o Comments
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- o Generate categories
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V.I.P.D. Theme Song

The V.I. Police Department has a theme song, "Don't Run, Don't Hide," written by local musicians Fusion Band for use in the government television channel documentary, "V.I. Cops."

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"When I wake up in the morning I pinch myself," he confessed to the his young audience, a smile splitting his face. "I never dreamed in a billion gazillion years that I'd be an author. I've got the best job in the world!"

Most of his books focus on nature subjects, a natural offshoot from his years in wildlife biology. They include books on manatees, butterflies and turtles. He showed video clips of him performing poems from his book, "Ocean Soup," including one in which he dressed as a lobster, and another in his best Tony Bennett guise.

More recently he drew on his childhood experiences and wrote his first novel, "Wiff and Dirty George." As a boy in London his mother called him "Wiff," possibly, he joked, because his hygiene left something to be desired, and his friend was known as "Dirty George." In real life they were a couple of regular kids. In the book, they become involved in thwarting a nefarious plot to take over London, a plot that starts with everyone's pants falling down.

The young audience thought that was just the best thing they'd ever heard. But they also got his message loud and clear – that the lives they are living can become the stuff of stories, and they can draw on those memories like a flashlight drawing on a battery to fuel their writing.

(Hmmm. Good description, but we still don't know how he smelled.)

After his presentation to the assembly, he spent an hour with individual classes, putting them through a series of exercises to brainstorm ideas that they were excited to write about and eager to read aloud to their classmates.

As the students wrote furiously, he walked around the room – *(Walked around? I don't think so!)* – he stalked the room, looming over their shoulders and offering words of encouragement. When students came up to read, he crouched down so that his head was at the same level as theirs, just inches away, savoring their words like a fine wine.



Good Hope fifth grader Robert Hunter's writing gets a thumbs up from author Steve Swinburne.

This is Swinburne's third trip to St. Croix to visit classrooms. So far on this visit he has taught writing – *(try again!)* – he has

preached on the mysteries and joys of writing to students at Claude O. Markoe Elementary, Eulalia Rivera School, Alfredo Andrews School, Juanita Gardine School and Good Hope.

Tuesday and Wednesday he'll be at Evelyn Williams School, and Thursday and Friday he'll be at Pearl B. Larsen.

Also on the agenda is a book signing from 5 to 6:30 p.m. Thursday at Undercover Books and Gifts in Gallows Bay.

When he's not in the classroom creating a whole new generation of literary geniuses, he's doing research for another book on turtles. He also has plans for – *OK!* – He is plotting a book to be called "The Last Straw: The Story of Plastic," which he worries is creating a serious problem for the world.

And another "Wiff and Dirty George" story is also in the works. While it's not known if any pants will fall down in the next one, you can bet it will be riddled with interesting details, sensory words and a lot of strong verbs.

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- [Undercover Books Hosts Children's Book Author Steve Swinburne](#)

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