

Sapling's Emerging Writer Series

This week **Sapling** speaks with **Kirk Wilson**.

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Sapling: Tell us about the process of getting your book published. Did you enter contests? Open reading periods? What transpired between sending the manuscript out initially and its acceptance by your publisher?

Kirk Wilson: Over a period of several years, I entered contests and submitted to open reading calls at presses I admire. Meanwhile every detail of the content, up to and including the title, was in a constant state of flux. In various incarnations, the manuscript

made the semi-finalist or finalist rounds a few times, and once was chosen for publication, but I declined for reasons I won't go into here. Two things to remember when you're a pawn in this game: First, you're competing against hundreds of other poets. Second, there's nothing more subjective than making judgments about poems. As the ancient saw goes, in matters of taste, no one is right. Your manuscript passes in front of a number of eyes at each press before final decisions are made, with the subjectivity factor in full play in every read. If you get published, that means your book was the "best" of a large field in the opinions of at least several people. It also means other books in the same competition were better than yours in the opinions of other readers. Eventually, my book was published as the result of winning a contest. The best part of the long process was that, in my own subjective opinion, the book is much better now than it would have been had it been published years ago.

Sapling: What was your experience with the editing of the manuscript? Did you have an opportunity to make revisions either at your own suggestion or at the suggestion of your editor? How involved were you in the design aspects of the book's production (cover image, design, etc.)?

KW: My publisher, **Trio House Press**, has been extremely supportive at every stage. They offered suggestions on edits. Some of those I accepted and others I declined. In a couple of cases I ended up rewriting the poem in question. The final decisions on any suggested changes were mine. The publisher was happy to design the cover and to involve me in the process. But this was my first and—who knows?—perhaps only book of poems, and I wanted the cover to look as I imagined it. I have a background in marketing and a friend who is a gifted designer, and the publisher agreed to let me create and submit to them several options for the cover. I did the concepts and took the photographs for these options, and my friend the designer made them things of beauty. The publisher and I worked through the choice of the winning design, and I'm very happy with the outcome. They did the interior layout and preproduction, and I had the opportunity to proof at every stage. I am very pleased with their work in those aspects.



Sapling: Did you publish any excerpts in literary journals or other periodicals before the publication of your book? If so, did this seem like a necessary part of the process for this particular project?

KW: A number of the poems were published in journals. I don't know how necessary that was, but it is an affirming thing to see your work in print. I imagine that, especially in the case of open submissions periods, it may help for the readers and editors at the press to see that some of your poems have already passed muster with editors at literary journals.

Sapling: In what ways have you been involved in the publicity and promotion of your book thus far? In what ways is your publisher helping you with marketing your book?

KW: Small presses do not have the staff or the resources to do all the ground work involved in promotions. (From what I hear of the publishing business these days, that may

be true of the major houses as well.) Again, my publisher has been and continues to be engaged and supportive. They consult on strategies, do social media and web postings, arrange some readings, and they will enter the book in a specified number of contests. But when it comes to poetry books in particular, the poet is responsible for the lion's share of the process. Your sales depend to a great extent on how hard you're willing to work.

Sapling: What are some things that surprised you about the process of getting your book published? Is there anything you wished you'd known beforehand about putting a book out into the world?

KW: It would have been helpful to be better educated about the ins and outs of bookselling. I ended up learning by trial and error. One thing I learned, for example, was that the small independent bookstores don't all buy from the major distributors, due to the discount structures involved. In some cases, it's necessary to negotiate a deal to sell your books to the store directly. Another thing I learned was that the bookstores aren't making many sales as a result of online readings during the pandemic. For the time being, I've adjusted my strategy to wait for live events to make a comeback in the area where I live and where I might actually sell some books, and to do online events elsewhere. Time will tell if that's a good idea.

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Kirk Wilson's work in poetry, fiction, and nonfiction is widely published in journals and anthologies. His awards include prizes in all three genres, a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship, and a Pushcart Prize nomination. Kirk's past lives include adventures in film, journalism, and marketing. He lives in Austin, Texas.

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For More Info:

www.KirkWilsonBooks.com