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(Neb.) - Tom McNeal to Speak at Writing Festival

By: John Thayer Posted at: 05/14/2012 06:44 AM

Fiction writer Tom McNeal will be the keynote speaker at the Story Catcher Writing Festival at the Mari Sandoz Heritage Center in Chadron, Neb. on Saturday, June 2 at 11:30 a.m. The festival follows a two day writing workshop for writers of fiction and prose.

"We are lucky to have a writer of Tom McNeal's caliber speaking in our area," said Dr. Matt Evertson, Chadron State College Associate Professor & Department Chair of English & Humanities. "His most recent work, *To Be Sung Underwater*, was named one of USA Today's top five novels of 2011 and was named a best book of 2011 by The Wall Street Journal and others."

Although born and raised in Santa Ana, Cal., McNeal spent part of every summer at the Nebraska farm where his mother grew up.

He has always been fascinated by his mother's stories of her girlhood in the remote town and knew that he eventually wanted to write about this region. (The fictional town of Goodnight in *Goodnight Nebraska* resembles Hay Springs.)

After earning a BA and a teaching credential from UC Berkeley, McNeal moved to Hay Springs, taught high school English, drove a school bus, substituted briefly in a one-room schoolhouse and began work on what would become *Goodnight, Nebraska*.

The book won the James A. Michener Memorial Prize, given to a first-time author 40 or older (he was 51 at the time). His latest novel, the highly lauded, *To Be Sung Underwater* looks at a midlife that took a wrong turn many years earlier.

His wife, Laura, also an author will also present a workshop session during the Story Catcher Writing Workshop. She and her husband collaborated first on a picture book called *The Dog Who Lost His Bob* and then on four young adult novels published by Knopf. Her first solo novel, *Dark Water*, was published in 2010 and was a finalist for the National Book Award and winner of the 2010 San Diego Book Award for Young People's Literature.

The McNeals live in southern California with their two sons, Sam and Hank.