



James Hickman discovers time, cost of publishing his own book

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By **Mike Marshall, The Huntsville Times**



Dave Dieter/The
Huntsville Times

James Hickman self-published his first book, "The Mindful Son: A Beacon of Hope Through the Storm of Mental Illness."

HUNTSVILLE, Alabama -- It cost about \$1,000 for a woman in California to design the cover. It was another \$100 for a woman in Cullman County to design the dust jacket and the side of the book.

A man in Texas took care of the reformatting, and a man in Cullman County handled the editing.

When James Hickman published his first book, "The Mindful Son: A Beacon of Hope Through the Storm of Mental Illness," he also paid \$2,800 for the first 250 copies.

Alpha Centauri Press was the publisher.

"That's me," Hickman said.

He's 37, a native of Huntsville and a 1992 graduate of Huntsville High School. He attended the University of Alabama, majored in American studies, minored in English and aspired to go to law school.

His law-school experiences led to his desire to write a book. A law-school adviser urged him to write one after reading Hickman's application paper to law school.

"From that point on," he said, "I had a seed planted in my mind that I'd write a book."

He was 24 at the time. It was before the delusions returned, and he was hospitalized for six weeks in 1998.

After he realized he had a mental illness, and after he received his master's degree in social work and became a licensed social worker, he knew it was time to write.

"I knew I had a compelling story that could benefit other people," he said. "Basically, I'm in recovery from schizophrenia. I had to overcome a lot of obstacles to get where I could be a therapist."

The illness, said Hickman, was the biggest obstacle.

"When you lose control of your faculties, when your mind causes you to have hallucinations, that is a hard thing to overcome," he said. "It carries a lot of depression, and it changes your whole life."

He was in his early 20s when he remembers the first symptoms of schizophrenia surfacing. He was in a class at the University of Alabama, talking to another student. When he left the class, he thought he could "hear what she was thinking in my own mind," he said.

Soon, he said, he started thinking he could hear what others were thinking.

"There was a man at a convenience store," Hickman said. "I thought he could take me to Heaven."

Hickman approached the man as he walked out of the convenience store.

"I asked him if he could take me to Heaven," Hickman said.

The man went back into the convenience store.

"A moment later, a couple of police officers spilled out of the store," Hickman writes on page 20 of his book. "God's Voice told me not to answer them, and I did not, as they peppered me with questions.

They began to grab my arms to handcuff me, and I resisted by merely holding my arms together."

He stayed in the hospital in Tuscaloosa for two weeks, then returned to Huntsville for an appointment at the Mental Health Center.

"In my mind, I didn't think I (had) a mental illness," he said. "It wouldn't be but a couple of more years before I realized I had a mental illness."

He realized when he was in the North Alabama Regional Hospital in Decatur.

"I would have a delusion about being in the Mafia or a religious figure," he said. "There were three or four other people (there) with the exact same delusion. I realized we couldn't all be right."

Today, Hickman, a therapist at the Mental Health Center of Madison County, will speak at the United Way.

He'll be speaking to the National Alliance on Mental Illness. He'll talk about his new book and how difficult it was to write it.

"I didn't realize how Herculean a task it was," he said. "I never dreamed it would take five years."

And when challenges emerged - challenges such as time management, among other things - he had little difficulty finding inspiration.

"I wanted to show that someone with my illness could write," he said.

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