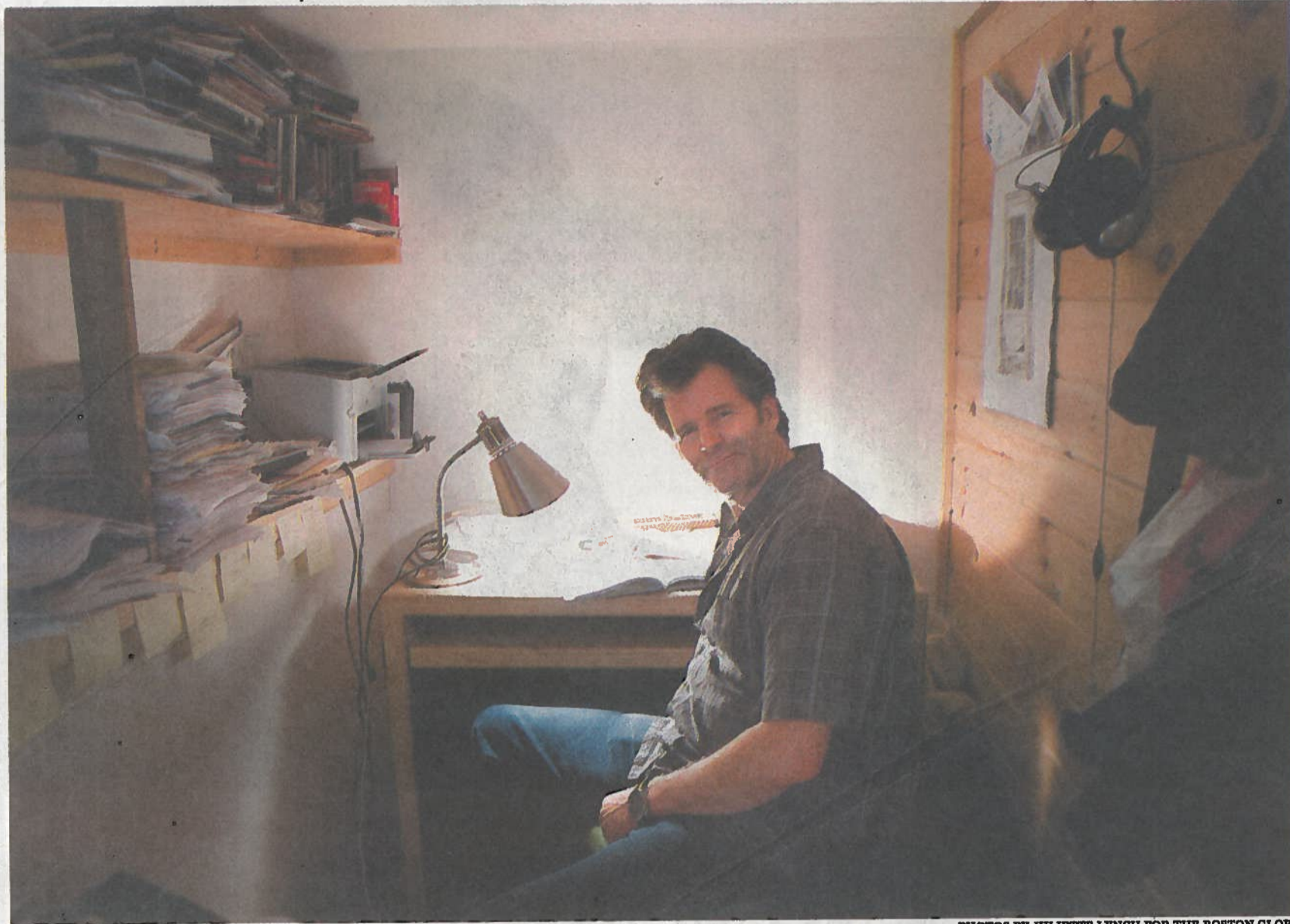


Books



PHOTOS BY JULIETTE LYNCH FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

'Dirty Love' excerpt

An excerpt from Andre Dubus III's latest novel, forthcoming from W. W. Norton.

Just before the shelves of fasteners and adhesive is a barrel of threaded pipe, gray and an inch and a half wide and four feet long. They are just like the one that lies in the trunk of Mark's car, and he grasps one. It is cool and hard, the sure diameter of it fitting nicely inside his fist.

He sees himself swinging it into the bald head of Frank Harrison, Jr., caving it in like a watermelon, the sheet pulled to Laura's shoulders in the Marriott's king-sized bed, her mouth hanging open in a silent scream.

But this image seems to come not from his life, but from a movie Mark saw as a boy and his hand lets go of the pipe and he keeps walking. How exhausted he is. Soon he finds the wood glue, a contractor's grade in a long plastic bottle he drops into his cart. He moves through busy people and their busy sounds and he finds the tile section, its various tools that apparently make any flooring job easier: wet saws and rubber gloves, grout floats and sponges and big plastic buckets. His stomach is an empty cavern. There's a throbbing in his forehead. Is he really going to do this? Take all this home and get on his hands and knees to repair the floor he no longer even treads? And does he even know how? Most of the process seems to be common sense, and there are directions on the side of the mortar bag, but will they be enough?

NEW ENGLAND WRITERS AT WORK

Andre Dubus III

Author finds inspiration in poetry, not in his surroundings — which are very cramped

BY EUGENIA WILLIAMSON | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Anyone who wants to know how Andre Dubus III became a writer should pick up his acclaimed 2011 memoir, "Townie," a riveting account of how he punched his way through a hardscrabble childhood on the Massachusetts-New Hampshire border to become the author of novels like "The Garden of Last Days" and "The House of Sand and Fog." His latest novel, "Dirty Love," is slated to be released Monday. He talked to us recently about place, poetry, and pencils.

**LAY OF THE LAND:** I need to have spent some time in a place, smelled it, seen the vegetation, the architecture, the brand names of the shops [to write about it]. But [even] if it's do-able for me to revisit a place, I make a conscious decision not to because I trust the imagination's memory to put it together. I think you can get too literal. I

want the literal and the factual and the real to anchor the fictional dream, but I don't want to be too loyal to the facts of the place and get bogged down with that.

**FINER POINTS:** I've always written longhand in pencil. The only thing that's changed is I've found a really good pencil. I used to be a Ticonderoga #2 guy because that's what I had in my carpentry apron if I wasn't using a carpenter's pencil, and then for a while, I'm embarrassed to say, I went to mechanical pencils. I was getting frustrated because I would sharpen my Ticonderoga with a utility knife, and sometimes it was just too damn slow to sharpen that. Then a friend of mine who's a film director turned me on to the Blackwing 602. What I like is that it sharpens to a really fine point, and it's got a great feel to it that I just can't describe. It's like when you taste



Andre Dubus III writes his novels out in longhand in pencil. His writing room is a small space in the basement.



a really good wine or a cognac: You know it's good stuff.

**ROOM OF ONE'S OWN:** [I write in] a jail cell, but it doesn't feel like a jail cell. It's five feet wide, eleven feet long, six-foot ceiling — it's a soundproof room in the basement. My little ship came in with my third book, "House of Sand and Fog," and now I could build this house . . . [but] I forgot to put in a writing room. I wanted a bedroom for every kid, a dance studio for my wife's company, an apartment for my in-laws, [but] I've never had a writing room — most writers don't — and I just forgot. But honestly, I could write in a janitor's closet.

**MORNING BECOMES HIM:** My habits have changed very little. I always prefer to write in the morning, if possible. There was a wrong notion floating around for a while that I had all these strange jobs — like bounty hunter and private investigator and house cleaner and bartender — and then I started

writing. I was [already] writing, and those were jobs that tended to happen at night, and I prefer to write in the morning.

**WELL VERSED:** In the last decade, I've become a real reader of poetry. I probably own 300 or 400 volumes. Oftentimes, it's customary that an independent bookshop will let you have a book when you do a reading, and I always get a new poetry volume from someone I haven't heard of. I read poetry before I start writing, and it takes me down to a good place. If I'm procrastinating, I'll read six of them, but usually I read about two. I'm not a scholar of poetry, and I don't write it, but it seems to me that the poetry of today is so prose-like and imagistic that it boils down to some truthful essence. It inspires me and holds the bar up high.

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