



□ A Timber Pines writer remembers Babe Ruth and a war that still grips his memories.

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SPRING HILL — Like most retirement subdivisions in Hernando County, the streets of Timber Pines are virtually deserted when the sun goes down

around 7:30 p.m.

People huddle inside their homes, the dead bolts secured and the flickering glow of the TV screen giving an eerie luminescence to the closed drapes in the living room.

For most, it's a time of relaxation. A chance to unwind from the day's activities. But at a certain well-kept home off Crown Oaks Drive, Carl Thien, a 79-year-old retiree, is hard at work.

Instead of a TV screen, Thien

huddles in front of his computer screen in the den, typing between 2-3 pages of whatever novel he's working on at the moment.

"I do my best writing at night," he says.

Thien has written three books, caddied for Yankee great Babe Ruth during the Depression, wrote news and photographed for the New York Post and helped secure secret

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documents from Japanese camps while stationed in Papua, New Guinea during World War II.

Today, he puts his life experiences in novel form to entertain new generations of readers.

Looking for Molly

"The day after his 75th birthday, Charlie Reinhard decided to look back over the years and think about what he wanted to do with the rest of his life."

So begins Thien's latest novel, "The Search for Molly Malone," now in libraries and select bookstores.

Charlie is actually Carl Reinhard, the novel's protagonist, and has taken characters and events in his life and weaved a fictional tapestry that spans the decades from World War II to today.

Thien takes his readers to the primitive jungles and villages of Australia and New Guinea, where Thien served as an army staff sergeant. The novel is billed as a romantic adventure spanning three generations of pre- and postwar lands and peoples whose cultures are not far removed from the stone age.

His protagonist, now retired, journeys back to the jungles to look up old friends, particularly the engaging Molly Malone, a sweetheart Thien once knew but lost contact with after the war.

Thien takes time in the book to develop the societal struggles of New Guinea — from the prejudices of interracial marriage to the rebuilding of a land devastated by war.

It took Thien a year-and-a-half to tell the tale. Heavily researched, the book ties together real life experiences with numerous hours reading books or talking to people on the telephone.

At one point, he visited the New Guinea embassy in Washington D.C. for records and background.

"I wanted to be accurate in portraying the political feelings of the time." Throughout the writing process, wife Virginia ("my harshest critic") would read over the pages and offer advice.

"It was an important part of my life," Thien says wistfully of his war years. His eyes scan the walls of his den where mementos hang suspended in time — a still-sharp feathered arrow once used by aborigines in battle, a flag of Papua, New Guinea, a perfectly preserved Black Butterfly, so cherished in the land down under it sells for \$125 and more.

Prominently displayed is a plaque bearing the Japanese symbols, "The Honorable Picnic," a nickname given Thien because he used to scrounge around for food in deserted Japanese villages and bring them back for the rest of his squadron.

"I never had a chance to write [what] I wanted to write," said Thien, who has spent his life working as a reporter, editor and press agent. "Now I have the chance to do it."

Golf with the Babe

In the depression years, a 13-year-old Thien landed himself — thanks to a rich uncle — a plumb after-school job at the exclusive St. Albans Golf Club on Long Island where he caddied for Babe Ruth. He was paid \$7.50 a day, good money for the time.

His awe of the Babe gave way to more practical concerns.

"It's not the fact that he was a sports idol," Thien says. "It was the fact he tipped good!"

The Babe was an average golfer, usually playing in the low 80s.

"He had a hell of a temper," Thien remembers. "He'd throw clubs, the driver, whatever, then

I'd have to go find the damn things."

About 10 years later, Thien ended up reporting and photographing the Yankees for the New York Post newspaper. During Ruth's retirement party, the big man, bundled up in a polo jacket, fought back a few tears. Thien is not sure the Babe even remembered him.

"He sort of acknowledged me but in a crowd of reporters and photographers, you can't get very close," Thien says.

All in the family

The writing bug runs in the Thien family. Two years ago, then 16-year-old grandson Justin Taylan wrote and self-published a graphic novel about his grandfather's experiences during the war.

Thien's latest book, "The Search for Molly Malone," is published under the Vantage Press label, a New York-based company that subsidizes an author's work. Thien shares the costs of printing and distribution. The book sells for \$12.95 and can be ordered by calling 1-800-882-3273.

The cost-sharing arrangement is not conducive to making millions. Indeed, Thien has yet to realize a profit on Molly Malone.

But that's not the point.

"I don't write to make money," he says. "I love to have a lot of people read the story. The biggest thrill of all is getting a reaction from people."

Thien recently got a phone call from a noted 90-year-old naturalist who praised the author for his attention to jungle habitats.

The amiable Timber Pines resident is planning a sequel to Molly Malone, which follows the fictional adventures of Molly's daughter, Gabi. Expect the midnight oil to be burning once again.