

Tech writer spins satirical tale in new novel

By David Maggiotto

Writer Tim Brown, who enjoys a good stroll, lately created a protagonist (aptly named Brian Walker) whose life revolves around the simple, sometimes controversial act of putting one foot in front of the other.

The author of two previous novels, "Deconstructing Acres" (1997) and "Left of the Loop" (2001), Brown, a five-year Dobbs Ferry resident, began work on "Walking Man" in the late '90s. Last year the novel was picked up by Bronx River Press, an independent publisher based in the Bronx, and it was officially released on April 7 as the publisher's first title.

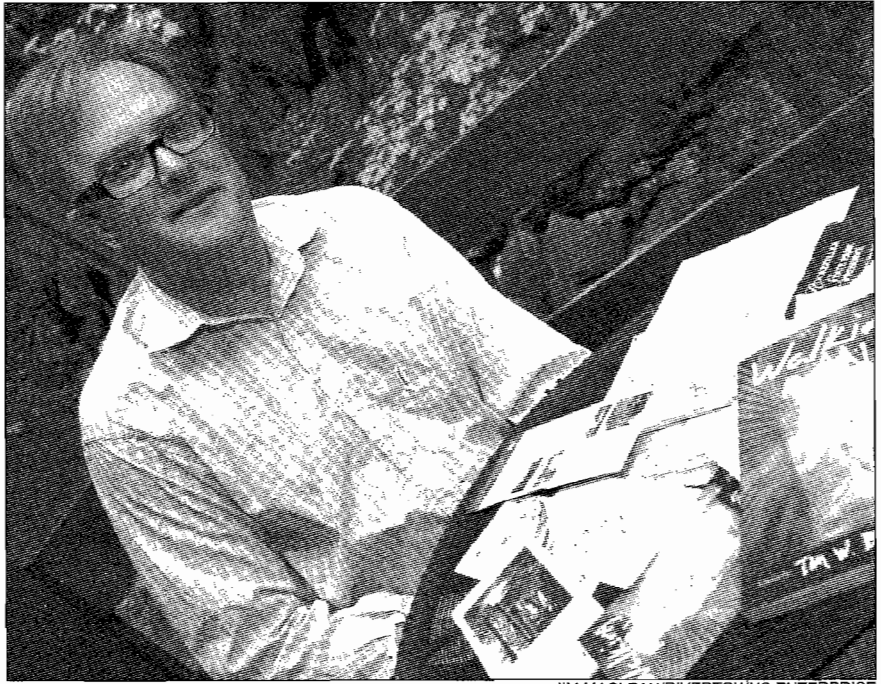
As in his earlier novels, Brown maintains a satiric tone in "Walking Man," though the reader can sense the author's sincere fondness for his hero. Brown's fiction focuses on "comic scenes with quirky subject matter and attention to detail," which for him is a pleasant departure from his day job creating manuals and developer guides as a technical writer in Manhattan.

"Walking Man" is written in the style of biography, though the story is fictional. The novel's back cover declares that it belongs to "the same metafictional universe as the films "Best in Show" and "This Is Spinal Tap." By comparing the novel to these iconic mock-documentaries, readers are tipped off to the book's fictional license. Some readers, however, might not catch on so easily.

"I gave the book to a guy I work with," says Brown, "and he tried to Google Brian Walker, and wondered why nothing was coming up. I had to explain to him that the book wasn't based on a real person."

In the novel, Brian Walker becomes a superstar in the world of zines — inexpensively produced, underground magazines or newsletters that occupied a niche in the counterculture in the 1980s. Like the novel itself, Brian's zine is titled *Walking Man*, and it chronicles the life and times of the pedestrian in downtown Chicago.

"The main thing about zines is the do-it-yourself attitude and the defiance



JIM MACLEAN/RIVERTOWNS ENTERPRISE

Author Tim Brown with copies his latest novel, "Walking Man"

of corporate culture," says Brown, who from 1982 to 1999 published his own poetry zine, *Tomorrow Magazine*, while living in Chicago. "They can be about any topic under the sun ... I think the scene really touched a lot of people."

Brown attests that the zine culture he was fond of has largely disappeared, with bloggers having picked up where zinesters left off. "Blogs take the role of zines where authors can just vent on any subject," he says. While Brown maintains a website, he does not keep a

regular blog.

In the novel Brian Walker's zine becomes notorious after he kicks the bumper of a BMW that nearly collides with him on his daily walk. The car's yuppie driver becomes incensed with Walker's audacity and presses charges against him, a private squabble that ultimately leads to a nationwide debate on the social order of pedestrians versus

CONTINUED ON PAGE 33

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

drivers. Brown writes: “When it came to Brian Walker, the media resembled a herd of stampeding elephants loudly trumpeting its disapproval.”

While “Walking Man” openly satirizes mass media and corporate America, Brown does not shy away from criticizing the people at the novel’s core. “I think that alternative culture emerges as bankrupt and corrupt as any established culture ... the holier-than-thou zine publishers who are so ‘open-minded’ that they are actually completely close-minded.”

Brown moved to Dobbs Ferry in 2003 with his wife and young daughter, who now is a fourth-grader at Springhurst Elementary School. An avid walker himself, Brown enjoys hikes around the Rockefeller Estate in Pocantico Hills.

Currently, Brown is in the Midwest on the tail end of an 18-city promotional book tour, his most extensive to date. He is toting many copies of “Walking Man” with him on the road, while more curious readers can find the title on the small press distribution website spdbooks.org, as well as at amazon.com.

Very recently, Barnes & Noble made a small purchase of the novel, and although being welcomed into this megastore’s inventory marks an achievement, Brown is keeping his hopes for “Walking Man” modest. “We’ve got about 1,500 copies in print,” he says, “and if you sell 1,000 copies of a book like mine, you’re doing pretty well in today’s climate.”