

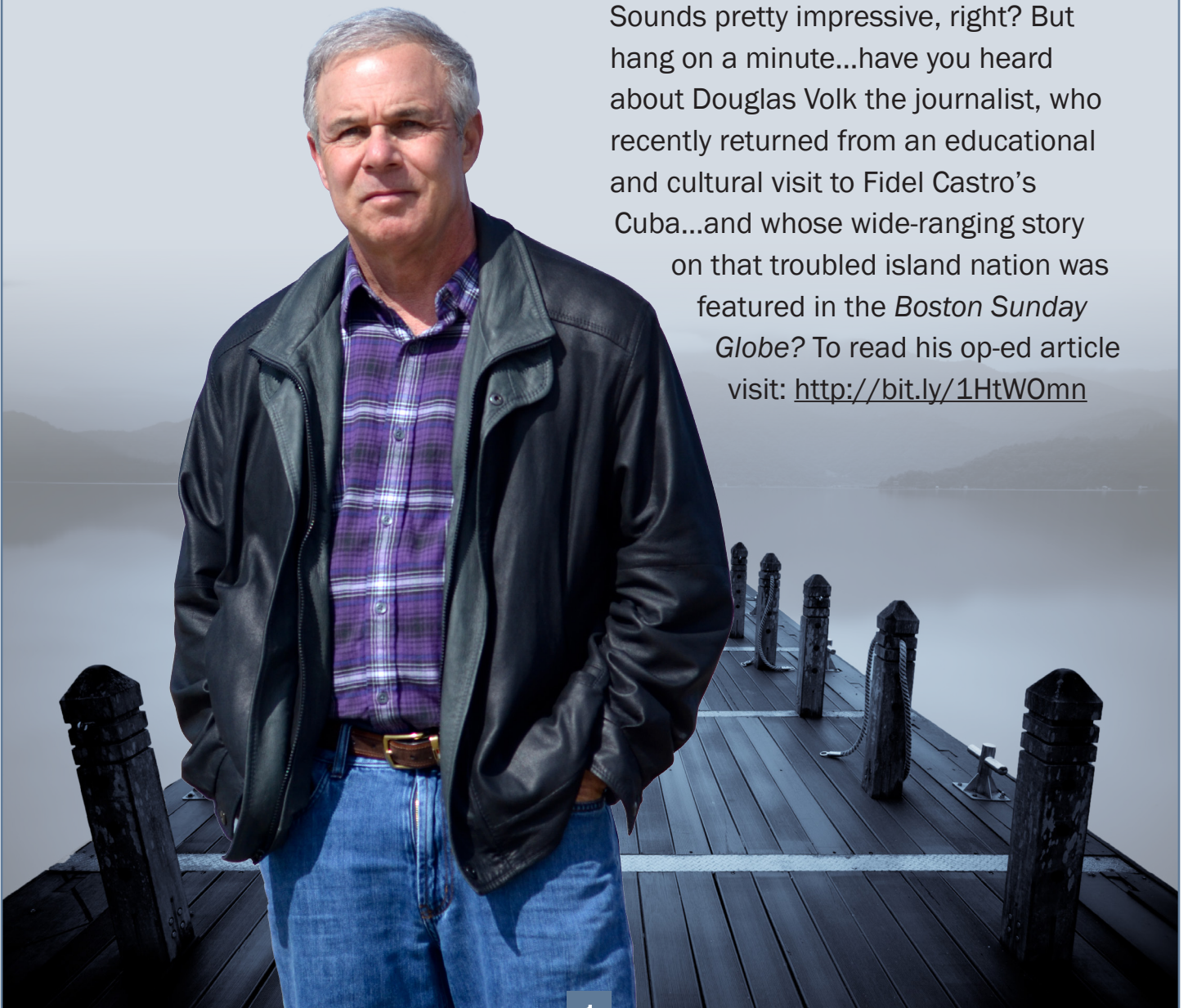
Author, Journalist, Social Activist and CEO

Will the Real Douglas Volk Please Stand Up?

BY TOM NUGENT

He's the longtime CEO at the award-winning Volk Packaging Corporation (VPC) in Biddeford, Maine—a highly successful businessman with an eagle eye for the bottom line. But he's also a widely praised author whose first book (*The Morpheus Conspiracy*, about a paranormal “curse” that drives people to commit murder) was described by the *Maine Sunday Telegram* as “skillfully plotted...a dark thriller...a hard book to put down.”

Sounds pretty impressive, right? But hang on a minute...have you heard about Douglas Volk the journalist, who recently returned from an educational and cultural visit to Fidel Castro's Cuba...and whose wide-ranging story on that troubled island nation was featured in the *Boston Sunday Globe*? To read his op-ed article visit: <http://bit.ly/1HtW0mn>



“I believe that every day is a gift, and I can’t wait to open that gift and get started each morning!”

— DOUGLAS VOLK

That reporting assignment in Cuba was “challenging and formidable,” says the peripatetic Volk, “but so was the reporting task I faced in Rwanda a year earlier.” During his lengthy odyssey across the violence-haunted East Africa country in 2014, he says he got a first-hand look at a nation that is “just now beginning to heal, and with a new sense of hope and possibility.”

Volk’s detailed report from Rwanda was published in the Portland Press Herald. To read his op-ed article visit: www.bit.ly/1yKs5N4

Oh...and while we’re at it, let’s not forget about Douglas Volk the former Maine Turnpike Authority board member (2002-09), who helped to oversee the widening of the state’s crowded toll road. Although he prefers to give the Authority’s full-time staff the credit for it, there’s no doubt that the controversial construction project was accomplished under budget and on schedule—thus triggering high-fives from traffic-weary motorists all across the region. . . .

Meanwhile, as a high-profile corporate executive, Douglas Volk has helped his fast-growing, Biddeford-based enterprise win numerous awards in recent years (including a coveted “Family Business of the Year Award” and the “Governor’s Award for Business Excellence”), while also leading VPC and its 78 employees to rapid growth and ever-increasing profitability.

Not bad, eh? For most corporate honchos in today’s stressed economy, that kind of success would be enough to bring on a lengthy bout of cigar-chomping euphoria... followed by a permanent vacation at the nearest country-club golf course.

But that’s not Volk’s style. Ask this former marathon runner about his 18 years as president and CEO of a thriving company and his ever-expanding role as a social activist in Southern Maine, and he’ll quickly tell you that he’s “only getting started” as a corporate manager and dedicated local volunteer who wants to “help make life a little better for everybody” in the Portland region and the state of Maine.

“For me, every day is a blessing and an opportunity,” says the 65-year-old Cumberland, Maine resident, while describing both his regular day at the office in Biddeford and his regular writing shift (he’s now working on his third novel in *The Morpheus Series*). “I love working with all of our people to provide our hundreds of customers with top-quality products...and I also love sitting down at the computer at night and on weekends to work on my books.

“I feel very fortunate to have been given the opportunity to help build a successful business—along with the opportunity to give back to the community as a volunteer at the Turnpike Authority and as a volunteer who’s trying to help newcomers to Maine find good jobs.

“I believe that every day is a gift, and I can’t wait to open that gift and get started each morning!”

He means it, too. Ask Volk to describe “the gift” in concrete detail, and he’ll tell you about a recent journey in which he stood awestruck on a mountainside in Rwanda, as a platoon of that country’s famous “mountain gorillas” cavorted in the morning sunshine. Or he’ll talk about the joy he felt on a recent afternoon in Boston, as he signed books at a Barnes and Noble bookstore and told readers about his newly published thriller. (Or the joy and hope he feels whenever he visits local classrooms as a volunteer speaker on “economic education” who loves to talk about his challenging job in the packaging industry.)

Spend a few hours hanging out with this business exec-author-journalist-activist at his corporate digs in Biddeford (or at his lakeside writing retreat in the shadow of Rattlesnake Mountain in Raymond), and you’ll soon find yourself asking: will the real Douglas Volk please stand up?

“I Think I Can, I Think I Can”

Whenever Douglas Volk looks back on his “amazing journey” as a corporate executive-turned-novelist-turned-social activist, the first thing he remembers is a breezy summer afternoon in 1982...and that unforgettable moment when he suddenly began to honk his car horn and shout: “I’m gonna do it! I’m gonna do it!”

With characteristic bravado, the fearless packaging rep (he was still a VPC salesman in those days) had just committed to a very challenging task: writing a ‘paranormal thriller’ from scratch.”

Volk knew the struggle would test him fully...but he was confident of his ability to “stay the course”—having recently completed his first 26-mile marathon, in spite of a painful foot infection that had threatened to knock him out of the four-hour endurance race.

“That was a magical moment, an unforgettable moment,” says Volk today, while recalling the horn-honking binge of three decades ago. “But the elation was soon replaced by anxiety. The truth was that I didn’t know a thing about writing, and I had no idea how much work would be required to actually write and then publish a book. All I understood right then was that I was determined to see it through—and that no matter how tough it got, I wouldn’t quit.”

What followed was a grueling writing struggle. Volk took courses in the craft of fiction-writing and rewrote endlessly until most of the novel (eventually entitled *The Morpheus Conspiracy*) had been revised at least twenty times.

He refused to give up, he says today, for one simple reason: he believed in his story.

After starting with a basic plot device (a paranormal “curse” infects a U.S. soldier who participates in a civilian atrocity at the height of the Vietnam War), Volk created a narrative in which the curse somehow permits its homicidal victims to creep into other people’s nightmares and kill them via “Somnambulistic Telepathy”.

After extensive plot revision and rewrite, *The Morpheus*

“Volk’s first novel is skillfully plotted—a web of conspiracy woven around four people fighting for their lives and their sanity.”

—STEVEN STEINBOCK, MAINE SUNDAY TELEGRAM

Conspiracy finally broke into print... and soon began to garner some stellar reviews from fascinated book critics.

Said the Portland, Maine Sunday Telegram reviewer Steven Steinbock: “Volk’s first novel is skillfully plotted—a web of conspiracy woven around four people fighting for their lives and their sanity.”

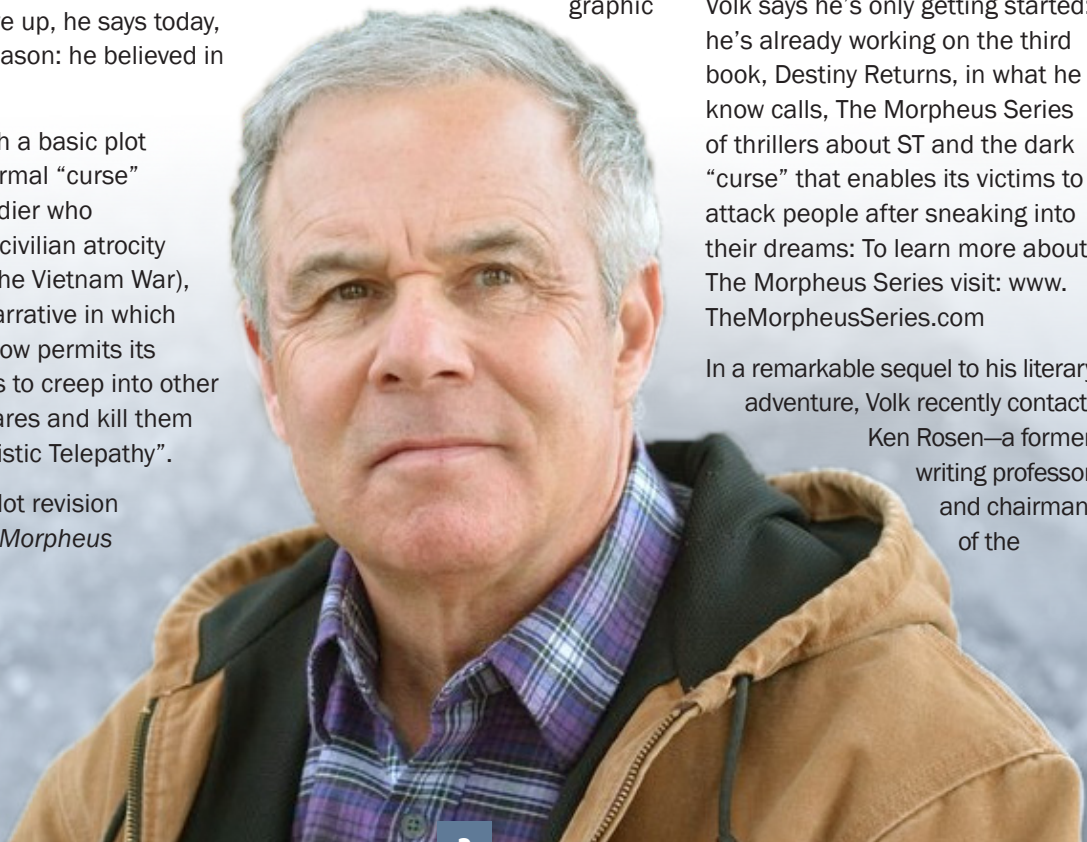
Writing in Maine’s *Kennebec Journal*, critic Hannah Seymour also lavished praise on Volk’s hard-won paranormal thriller: “The plot of *The Morpheus Conspiracy* is tight, its sleep research episodes and characters believable. But be forewarned, gentle readers. Like land mines, violence, sex and graphic

terms are planted in virtually every chapter. This is not the book for anyone into the softer side of dreams.”

As you might expect, the indefatigable Volk is convinced that “perspiration rather than inspiration” was the key to his publishing success. “I guess you could say my approach to writing was the same one taken by *The Little Engine That Could*: ‘I think I can, I think I can!’ The process was exhausting, but also exhilarating. In the end, I got so hooked on writing that I began making notes for a second thriller.” [*The Surgeon’s Curse* will be published later this year.]

Indeed, the relentlessly determined Volk says he’s only getting started: he’s already working on the third book, *Destiny Returns*, in what he know calls, *The Morpheus Series* of thrillers about ST and the dark “curse” that enables its victims to attack people after sneaking into their dreams: To learn more about *The Morpheus Series* visit: www.TheMorpheusSeries.com

In a remarkable sequel to his literary adventure, Volk recently contacted Ken Rosen—a former writing professor and chairman of the



University of Southern Maine English Department who'd helped him launch his first book, way back in the 1980s—and found him living in retirement. The two talked at length and Volk thanked his former mentor profusely for his advice and support.

Said the delighted Rosen, who also gave a major boost to best-selling Maine author Carolyn Chute (*The Beans of Egypt, Maine*) early in her own writing career: "I'm glad I was able to help Doug a little with that first book. There's a quality of humanity in him that I responded to, way back 30 years ago, when he took his first creative writing class with me."

Interestingly enough, the increasingly popular author also credits his family for helping him "stay the course" as a writer. Frequently encouraged by his wife of forty years, Gail, he says he also got a "major boost" from his two kids. At one particularly discouraging point,

he remembers, his then-12-year-old son Jonathan (today an Infectious Disease M.D. in San Francisco) challenged him directly: "Dad, you told me never to quit on anything—so why are you quitting on your book? You shouldn't give up!"

"That's right," added Jon's older sister, Danielle, now a physical therapist in Philadelphia. "Dad, get busy!"

As you might expect, Douglas Volk says he's having "far too much fun" these days to think about retiring. And even a brief look at his jam-packed daily schedule (he usually puts in a full day at VPC, along with his volunteer work for Hope Acts and frequent bursts of fiction-writing) is enough to show that he hasn't lost any of the foot-speed which helped him finish

all those 26-mile marathons, a few years back. Ask him to describe his "philosophy of life," and he'll tell you that "for me, each new day is a chance to learn something I didn't know before.

"I really don't take myself all that seriously," he adds with a light-hearted smile. "But I do take my business seriously, and my responsibility to all our associates and their families at Volk Packaging. And I'm very serious about doing my little bit to help the community in which I live.

"At the end of the day, I believe you will be measured by how much you have given back."



THE MORPHEUS SERIES

www.TheMorpheusSeries.com