

AUTHOR / BOOK RELEASE

It's not a dream

As Hocking's first print release nears, Austin woman finds fame 'surreal'

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At 5 a.m., one day recently, Amanda Hocking had just finished a long night of writing and was settling into bed.

That's when this self-publishing author from Austin with a \$2 million book deal wondered if her quick rise to fame in the book world was real.

"This can't possibly be happening," Hocking said. "This has to be like some kind of weird dream and I'm going to wake up, or I'm have a psychotic breakdown, I'm imagining all this."

"It's so awesome that I can't wrap my mind around it."

The 27-year-old author who's sold more than 1 million copies of her self-published books is hitting another mark in her career: her first print book, "Switched," the first in her Trylle Trilogy, is being published by St. Martin's Press and will be released Tuesday.

Going to print

Hocking made the decision to have her books become available in paperback form as well because e-books make up just a small percentage of the market. She wanted to branch out and reach more readers, including more teenagers.

"And anybody can buy a paperback book, not everybody has an eReader," Hocking said.

If Hocking needs further surreal experiences, you can mark Jan. 5 as on such date. Hocking will be a guest on Anderson Cooper's daytime talk show "Anderson," taping Jan. 5. She will promote her book and share her story of perseverance.

When she heard from the show's producers over the summer, she "kind of freaked out," she said. She is a big fan of Cooper, and she's both excited and nervous about the show.

Following her time in New York coming up, and a quick stop Jan. 10 in Rochester for a book signing, Hocking will head off on an international tour from Jan. 12 to Feb. 3. It



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"I got recognized in Wal-Mart the other day, but that's the first time," says paranormal romance author Amanda Hocking, a 2002 Austin High School graduate. Her first print book, "Switched," will be released to the public and available in bookstores Tuesday.

will take her to England, Italy, Spain and Ireland — Hocking has not been out of the country with the exception of a cruise in the Bahamas a few months ago.

With the busy schedule coming up, she doesn't have any events scheduled in Austin yet, but plans to have something in the future surrounding the Trylle Trilogy.

Hitting it big

January 2011 was the point where Hocking realized her books were a big deal. More than 400,000 of her books sold during that month alone, something that seemed surreal to her.

Even with all of her success and her book deal, which had some of the top publishing companies in a bidding war, Hocking said she does not consider herself to be rich and famous.

"Because I have this idea that people who are rich and famous are glamorous and jet-setting, and I'm really not,"

she said. "I'm pretty normal, I think."

She still resides in Austin, although in a bigger home, she keeps the same people in her life and does the same things she always has.

The biggest change for her is that she's able to make writing her full-time job, spending an average of eight to 10 hours a day working on her books. There's also the financial independence that has come from her success, as opposed to before when she was struggling, she said.

The quick leap to fame "definitely surprised" her. She said she's always wanted to be a writer and thought she would become one, but she didn't think it would play out the way it did, happening so fast and be so big.

"I try not to think about it that much because it still seems strange," Hocking said. "It doesn't even really make sense to me."

Page A4: Starting in self-publishing

Children's treatment results in conviction

2011 area news included Lyle school district upheaval

By Kay Fate
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Much of the top news in the area in 2011 revolved around children: parents mistreating their sons and upheaval in a school district.

Child chained

Brian and Charity Miller of rural Dexter were convicted in July of chaining at least one of their children to a bed and withholding food from the other.

The children, two boys under the age of 8, have been in a foster home since authorities arrested the Millers in April.

Their parents were each sentenced to a year in jail, now being served in the Mower County Jail.

However, the Millers retained their parental rights, thanks to the intervention of the Cherokee Nation.

Because the children are registered with the Cherokee Nation, the Federal Indian Child Welfare Act weighed heavily in the case. Under ICWA rules, Mower County Human Services has to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that it has made an active effort to reunify the Miller family.

"They have failed to meet this burden of proof," District Judge Fred Wellmann said of the county's reunification efforts in a July ruling. "Thus, the Millers' parental rights cannot be terminated, although this Court has found that they failed to meet their parental duties to (their sons), are palpably unfit to parent the children, and have caused the children egregious emotional harm."

The Millers are scheduled to be released from jail in mid-January — about the same time as a scheduled 90-day progress review in their attempt to reunite with the children.

Lyle School

Lyle had the distinction of being just one of



five school districts in southeastern Minnesota to make adequate yearly progress in the No Child Left Behind standards. And residents approved the renewal of a \$1.5 million operating levy in November.

It was cause for celebration, but much of the attention has been focused on the district and its leadership since April.

That's when former superintendent Jerry Reshetar left after 12 years. He said it was because of a "differing philosophy." The board appointed principal Jim Dusso as superintendent after a closed meeting to evaluate his job performance. The Austin Post-Bulletin protested that the action violated the Minnesota Open Meeting Law. The district disagreed.

The public comment policy was changed by the school board in May, leading a group of citizens to complain that it stifled communication.

Board meetings have typically drawn more than 75 people in this town of about 600, sometimes turning into angry exchanges among board members or by the public in attendance.

Board members have walked out of meetings; a no-confidence letter aimed at Dusso was circulated, a restraining order was filed by Dusso against a former employee; the board treasurer took the signature stamps and was ultimately removed from that post; and deputies carried three women out of a board meeting after one woman refused to leave.

A new board member was selected this month, something both sides hope will bring positive results.

Page A4: More on 2011's big news

Voters approve new school

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Austin voters approved a \$28.9 million bond issue in November for Austin Public Schools build a new fifth- and sixth-grade school, and add classrooms and improvements to Woodson Kindergarten Center.

The new school building will be located just east of Ellis Middle School.

The need for additional school facilities is a result of growing enrollments in the district. Over the next four to five years, 400-500 more students are expected in the district. The expected growth should reach about 1,000 kids over the next 10 years, according to a demographic study done in the district.

Woodson's project will start construction in February and conclude in August, so the building will be ready for the 2012-13 school year. Construction for the new school will begin in summer 2012 and is tentatively scheduled to conclude in May 2013, ready for the 2013-14 school year.

Sixty-four people from the district are part of the building steering committee to help create ideas for designing the new intermediate school building. The building will have a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and math) focus for 884 students and will be 112,250 square feet.

The voter-approved new school comes after data was released in September indicating the district failed to meet Adequate Yearly Progress goals for the fourth year in a row. None of the district's schools met AYP goals either.

New school board members

Incumbent Austin School Board members Kathy Green and Don Fox were elected to another term, the fourth for Green and second for Fox. First-time candidates Angie

Goetz and Greg Larson also were voted onto the board.

Fox, Goetz, Green and Larson will be part of a school board that will work to open the new intermediate school. They will serve three-year terms, as the district continues the transition from odd-year to even-year elections; terms are usually four years.

Sumner starts 45/15 calendar

Sumner Elementary School became the first in the Austin district to move to a modified, 45/15 calendar. They started school Aug. 1.

School is in session for four 45-day quarters, with 15 days off in between. Summer break will be 30 days. That shorter break could be beneficial when it comes to the "summer slide," when students forget what they learned the previous academic year, school officials.

The school just finished up its mid-year benchmarking, and the results look positive, said principal Sheila Berger, showing that they're already seeing difference academically.

Superintendent gets 3-year extension, pay raise

Austin Public Schools Superintendent David Krenz got a new three-year contract with the district. The deal includes a 2.5 percent salary increase for this school year, raising his pay to \$139,359.

The three-year extension, which salary increases the first two years with the third year to be negotiated, was approved by the Austin School Board in December. The contract is for the period of July 1, 2012, through June 30, 2015.

Page A4: More on 2011

Lake City police officer dies

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LAKE CITY — Lake City police officer Shawn Schneider died Friday at Saint Marys Hospital in Rochester from wounds he suffered when he was shot in the head Dec. 19 as he responded to a domestic dispute.

Schneider, 32, had been in critical condition since the shooting. He leaves behind a wife and three young children.

"The family thanks everyone for their overwhelming support and well wishes during this difficult time," according to a statement by Mayo Clinic.

The news quickly spread through Lake City and hit hard, said Doug Wallerich, a friend of Schneider's.



Schneider

"It's devastating. It's horrible, I'm as shocked as anyone else," he said. Wallerich owns the Railhouse Grill, which is within a few blocks of where Schneider was shot.

The restaurant and bar were full Friday evening until news of Schneider's death arrived.

"It took a half hour and it was quiet and lonely in here," he said. "It's a somber moment."

Schneider was "a true small-town police officer. He would do anything for you; he would do anything for anybody," Wallerich said. "This is hitting a lot of hearts."

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PUNCHLINE

"I don't have time for this. I've got a date with the cat."
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