

Writing reshapes passion

By **CHRISTOPHER YEE**
Staff Writer

Claybourne D. Shelton, East Los Angeles College Emeritus faculty, is a man of action and adventure.

This is not to say that he goes out and seeks hidden treasures in ancient temples, a la Indiana Jones. Rather, he has embraced those themes as an author of fiction.

Largely unknown to those on the ELAC campus, Shelton has authored a series of three novels, "The Age of Eternal Fire," "Journeys in the Primal Forest," and "Uprising on the Rio Jari," which chronicle the trials and tribulations that the Deer People, a tribe in northern South America, went through 13,000 years ago.

The primary reason why none of Shelton's students or colleagues would be aware of his new passion for writing fiction is because his tenure as an instructor is longer than the length of his career as a writer.

Fresh off of earning a master's degree in biology—his second master's degree, the first being in education—from the University of Oregon, Shelton began teaching biology at ELAC in 1967 and set major precedents within the department.

He wrote the curriculum for Biology 3, which many Elans take in order to satisfy the life science requirement for IGETC, as well as for Biology 6 and 7, which are required for all biology majors as well as many other science majors.

Even though biology has always

been his passion, the students are what have always been Shelton's favorite part of his job.

"I've really enjoyed my time here. I love the students—they want to get ahead, and they understand that education is an open door to the future.

"You can't ask for better conditions than that," Shelton said.

Then, seemingly all of a sudden after 41 years of teaching biology at ELAC, Shelton decided to write a fiction novel.

In November 2008, upon driving his wife to Palm Springs so she could tend to her ailing father, Shelton was inspired to write his first book, "The Age of Eternal Fire," by an article he read in the Los Angeles Times.

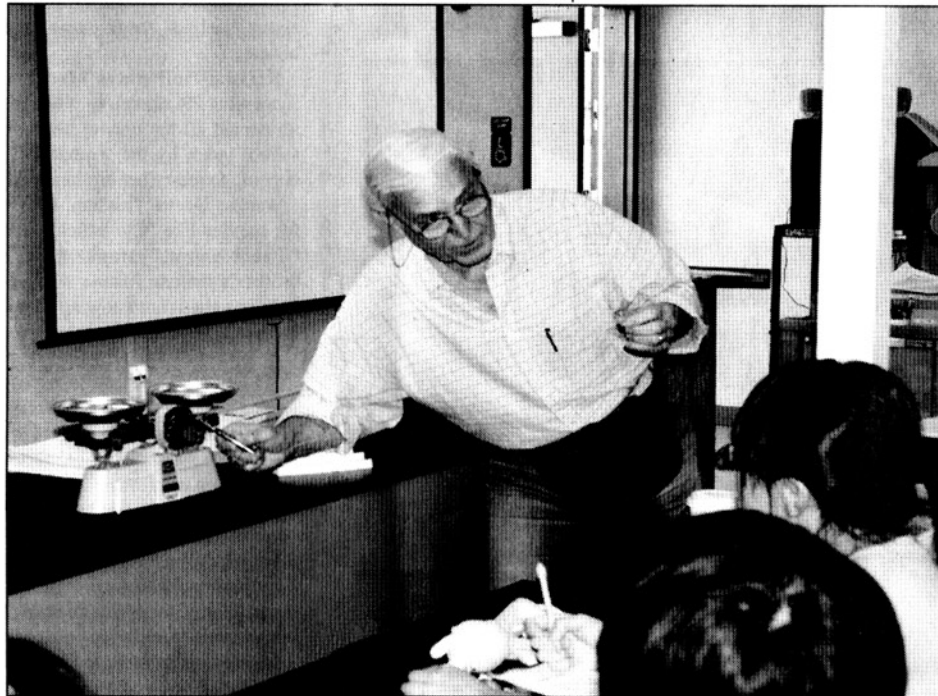
The article was about a paleontologist from the University of Oregon who determined that a comet that struck the Rocky Mountains 13,000 years ago, which caused a mass extinction of mammals, also caused tiny diamonds to form in rocks.

However, having been fascinated with the Andes mountain range and the Amazon river in South America, Shelton decided to transplant the comet strike to that particular location.

"Then my imagination took over," Shelton said.

Shelton then built the Deer People out of that setting and situation; knowing that the jungle was very dangerous given the predators and poisonous plant life, he knew they would have to live in the mountains.

He knew that the tribe would be centered around a shaman,



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MAN OF PASSION—C.D. Shelton, ELAC Emeritus faculty teaches biology to a classroom of students. Shelton has taught at ELAC since 1967. Recently, Shelton has published three books, with two more on the way.

a combined medicine man and healer.

He knew that he would need a protagonist to drive the story, a young man named Etok who tells the shaman of a premonition had that the comet would one day wipe out the tribe if they did not take action.

Once Shelton had developed

those ideas, he was able to complete his first book in November 2009 for publication in January 2010 and move quickly on to writing the two others that continue the Deer People's story, which were also published in July and August 2010.

Although he had attempted to write fiction in the past, these were

the first works he had ever written to completion.

"The first book was the hardest one for me. ("Journeys in the Primal Forest" and "Uprising in the Rio Jari") came a little more easily because I sort of had a feeling about this tribe that I had created.

"They manifested themselves in

their world, and I felt comfortable writing about them."

"The characters sometimes take on a life that is unexpected.

"You write them into a situation and then you write knowing exactly how the characters would act in that situation," said Shelton.

Knowing very well how difficult the publishing process can be, Shelton expressed extreme gratitude to his publisher for taking such quick action in making his work available to the world.

"I was really honored that (Choice Publishing House) had confidence in me.

"It's nice to have someone who has faith in what you're doing," Shelton said.

Shelton also has two novels planned that are set in modern day, "Raiders of the Primal Forest" and "Tenderfoot Rider," the first being a thriller set around the slash-and-burn culture in Brazil and the second focusing on life in rural Wyoming.

"I wasn't ready to leave the Amazon yet," he said of "Raiders," "and with "Tenderfoot," I drew on my upbringing in Texas and experiences with the rodeo."

Regardless of his work in teaching biology and his newfound passion for writing, Shelton still manages to spend time with his wife, three children, and four grandchildren.

"My wife has always encouraged me to do what I want to do," he said.

Shelton plans on teaching and writing for as long as he has his health.