

***Scrawlins***

*by Rusty DeWees. Rusty D. Inc, 219 pages. \$24.95.*

**Rusty DeWees** will probably never escape his alter-ego, “The Logger.” And why should he. The plaid-wearin’, dialect-talkin’, chainsaw-wieldin’ hunk has earned a good living for this 6-foot-4 redhead reared in Stowe. But the gifted actor and comedian steps out — or rather, inward — in *Scrawlins*. A collection of short essays that first appeared as columns in *Vermont Times*, the off-center observations, anecdotes and insights are those of the Real Rusty.

He does bear some resemblance to his backwoodsman — as in, a little rough-hewn. For one thing, DeWees has no use for the fussy strictures of “proper” English: spelling, syntax, punctuation, etc. If this offends language purists, they should think of, say, Mark Twain. Truth is, DeWees has a pitch-perfect ear for vernacular speech — including his own. And, as Vermont poet **David Budbill** notes in his foreward to *Scrawlins*, DeWees has flawless timing as well. This can be harder to pull off in prose than in performance, but DeWees makes up for it in the rhythm of his sentences. He writes in “ben and betsy franklin”: “Made a few hundred bucks selling my DVDs at the fair. Drivin’ home, I spent every dime of it. I got gas.”

Budbill has known DeWees since he cast him 21 years ago as a French-Canadian logger in his play, *Judevine*. The role set DeWees’ career on a roll. “Rusty’s writing is straightforward, self-effacing and blunt,” Budbill observes. Indeed, he calls it like he sees it. But while DeWees is unsparing of sacred cows and pretentious ways, he is, more often than not, kindhearted and thoughtful. The Logger, a Sensitive Guy A-yup. Just read the piece about his dying father — titled “number one important soul” — and see if it doesn’t make you weep.

DeWees is attuned to authenticity; his affection for Vermont and its vestigial old-fashioned ways struts across these pages like a parade. And his down-home, cut-the-crap sensibility results in a practical wisdom. He writes in “the good ole days”: “When things aren’t going swell for me, I concentrate on the best of it, and remember that what you can’t change, you have to stand. If you stand it long enough, with the right attitude, it might turn out good.”

These are DeWees’ good ole days, and reading *Scrawlins* is a gol darn nice way to spend one of your own.