

Sisters author has sold millions of books

By **Katy Yoder**
Correspondent

If you research Sisters resident Melody Carlson online, it's quickly clear she's a prolific published author. In fact, after writing over 250 books, she and her husband stopped counting. To date, she's sold over 7.5 million books — and the number is still climbing.

She was inspired to write over 20 years ago, after reading a book by Irish novelist Maeve Binchy. The popular writer's well-crafted descriptions and beloved characters allowed Carlson to escape into the pages for a little while. About a year after reading Binchy, she started writing and hasn't stopped. Why should she? There are still plenty of ideas and stories wanting to be told. The subject matter can come from anywhere. Magazines, newspapers, even dreams. Like her book "The Christmas Shoppe," where people visiting an old junk shop have a flashback to their past. That was a vivid dream she turned into a book.

Her writing studio is decorated with beloved items from a beach house on the Oregon Coast. An antique Underwood typewriter, used when she was a child, sits on the corner of her desk. There's a wall filled with books she's written and mementoes from family and past camping trips.

She spends six to eight hours per day working in her studio; usually four to six hours writing and two doing office work. There's also time for marketing when a new book comes out. She does interviews for magazines, radio, blogs and Skype.

The book market was sagging for a while but in the last three years, it's picked up.

"When I was really busy, I did 10 to 12 books per year," she said sitting at her desk. Now she averages six books per year.

"When I started writing, I didn't have much time, so I squeezed it in when I could and wrote really fast. I've been doing it for years, so it's gotten easier. When I come into my studio, I can turn off the outside world, escape and just write."

Her books are usually released through Christian publishers. But they're not always on Christian bookshelves. Her annual Christmas books are considered mainstream. "Some of my books are very Christian and others are not. Some have a strong inspirational message with hopeful answers that I believe are true and encouraging."

If she had to describe the essence of her books, she'd use one word: Grace.

"Life is complicated and many-layered," she

explained. "In books you can peel stuff back. Hopefully, that makes you a bit more kind and gracious to others."

One of her recent books, "Courting Mr. Emerson," has more of a message than others.

"Willow is an outspoken hippie personality," Carlson said.

Some readers are offended by her books, but its obvious people like them, too.

"My son manages my website," she said. "It's best that I don't read my reviews. I find I'll only remember the one negative out of 15 positive reviews. So I don't read them anymore."

One important piece of advice Carlson has for aspiring writers is to keep writing.

"If you suppress creativity, it can make you sick. It's much more fun being creative. My husband jokes that if I wasn't writing books I'd be remodeling the house every month. He says, 'go write another book, please!'" she said, laughing.

There are some exciting developments for Carlson.

"Some of my books have been optioned for film." Carlson is working with Hallmark, and according to them, there will be a movie made from her book "All Summer Long." Filming will begin late spring in Vancouver. She and her agent are talking with Hallmark about doing more projects.

"I have written a couple of scripts for movies and am learning how to do script adaptation," she said.

For Carlson, people's problems inspire stories.

"It can be random. I was sitting at a stoplight in Bend and an old Chevy pickup was sitting next to me, there was an old woman that looked about 100 years old and in the driver's seat was this young good-looking guy. That Inspired 'Armando's Treasure.'"

In it Armando ends up saving the entire family.

Carlson has written books that tackle tough topics. They're not easy to write, and the stories they reveal can take their toll on her. She has done 100 teen books on serious issues like human trafficking, drug addiction, and date rape. The books deal with difficult issues, but she knows they must be discussed. After finishing that group of books, she decided to return to Maeve Binchy-type books.

"It's better for me, too," she said. "Right now, I'm working on a gift book called 'Gathered around the Campfire.' It's for travelers or campers who want something fun to read."

With the snow finally receding, the Carlsons will be getting out their motorhome.

"It's the perfect thing to do while I'm doing this camping book," she said.

Her book project is full of old stories from her childhood, camping with her family. She's looking forward to reminiscing and sharing her stories with even more readers.

To learn more about Melody Carlson, visit her website at www.melodycarlson.com.



PHOTO BY KATY YODER

Melody Carlson in her Sisters writing studio, where she writes at a prolific rate.

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