



Gratitude as an Attitude

Eugene writer learns lessons from a series of deaths around her

by Patricia L. MacAodha

Eugene writer Linda Wagner self-published her first novel, *Faithful to My Heart* (Infinity Publishing, 1995; \$15.95 soft-cover), through a company based in West Conshohocken, Pa. The book's main protagonist, data analyst Brooke Kent, is prodded by her best friend, Renee, to go on an all-lesbian cruise.

Brooke, a single, middle-aged lesbian, is in the throes of depression after the deaths of her parents in an accident during their second honeymoon. Lacking the family support she has known, she drifts through life, watching *Space Prairie* reruns and allowing the occasional sex fantasy to momentarily distract her from her unhappiness. Renee is determined to rocket Brooke out of her current space, and how better than a cruise to the South Pacific with a ship full of other lesbians? What happens blasts both women to a new level of awareness about what really matters in life.

Wagner was born in Chicago, moving with her family to Nogales, Ariz., when she was 10. "At first

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—Linda Wagner

it was a bit of a cultural shock—from the suburbs of the city to a rural town on the border with Mexico where I was the only 10-year-old who did not know Spanish," she says.

Wagner was determined from childhood to be a writer. She wrote plays in grade school, later directing them. She also tried her hand at short stories and poetry.

In her junior high school journal she wrote: "When I grow up, I'm going to be a writer...no, I am a writer now, when I grow up, other people will know it." One of six siblings, she watched her

sisters follow the norm expected for girls: "marry a guy, stay home and have kids, etc." Wagner knew that she was gay in early adolescence and that "I would not follow in my sisters' paths."

She realized education was her ticket to being able to support herself and create an atmosphere that would let her write. She began working at age 14, financing her college education. The fear that faces many writers—that their calling won't feed them or pay the bills—led her to go into a career as a "data nerd."

A series of deaths around her—both parents, two friends who died from cancer and a cousin who was killed—sent her reeling, but "within each tragedy was a gift, a lesson...and one of the biggest was looking at 'How am I spending my time?'"

Through her mother's passing, Wagner realized that all the stories inside—the novel, short stories, a children's story and more—were waiting to come out and that they were waiting for her to unlock that door to her own creativity. She remembers her mother telling her, "Find what you love and live it."

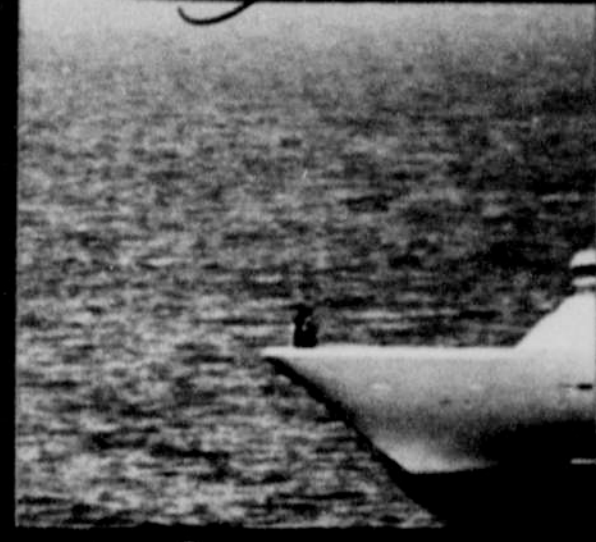
"There are ways," Wagner says, "to make our passions real, no matter what they are. For me, I only had to write." Encouragement from her partner at the time and from friends led her to begin *Faithful to My Heart*.

At age 46, Wagner is no longer with that lover—the 17-year relationship ended more than two years ago. They remain friends and continue to co-parent their 9-year-old daughter, who, Wagner says, "is an old soul, and I learn a lot from her."

She fondly recalls the years growing up in Nogales and credits those experiences with teaching her "about family, connections to people, celebrating life together and showing up when people need support."

When not writing or working her research job, Wagner enjoys a balanced life that is, at the same time, active and calm. "I can be as relaxed with a quiet evening home writing, meditating or vegging out as I am out for a night of fun at a Hot Flash dance with hundreds of other women." She

Faithful
to My Heart



Linda Wagner

is cautious with some portions of her life yet ever prepared to be the daredevil (she became a snowboarder at 43) and "to try a new physical challenge."

She reflects the classic need of a writer for solitude but enjoys meeting new people, being out in nature and driving to Portland for an evening out. She says she lives "a grateful life," starting each day with gratitude for "my health, my family, friends, a job with people I respect and the time and support to write."

Reflecting the pattern of many lesbian writers, Wagner has yet to be able to become self-supporting at her craft, keeping the day job while she writes at night. She doesn't seem to resent this arrangement and contemplates "the brevity of all this" and hopes "to make myself count in the moments I'm here."

She says, "If I had a personalized bumper sticker, it would say, 'Small gestures lead to grand movement.'" **JO**

To purchase LINDA WAGNER's novel, *Faithful to My Heart*, contact her at LMWTrek@aol.com.

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Linda Wagner became a snowboarder at the age of 43.

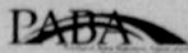
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