

# THE ARTS

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## SEASIDE AUTHOR WONDERS: 'WHERE IS THE BODY BURIED?'

### Melissa Eskue Ousley unveils new paranormal thriller 'Pitcher Plant' at Beach Books

By HEATHER DOUGLAS  
FOR COAST WEEKEND

One thing becomes clear after spending time with local author Melissa Eskue Ousley: She is a very productive woman. In addition to being a full-time academic adviser at Clatsop Community College, she is a mom, a freelance editor and an award-winning novelist.

Eskue Ousley will soon unveil her fifth novel at a Lunch in the Loft event at noon Wednesday, May 17, at Beach Books in Seaside. The \$25 registration fee includes lunch with the author and a copy of her new book, "Pitcher Plant," a novel set in Seaside that, like many of the author's other works, centers around the paranormal.

Though Eskue Ousley and her family are Seaside residents, "Pitcher Plant" is in no way autobiographical.

The inspiration came when she and her husband, Chris Ousley, were looking at a fixer-upper in Seaside.

"The book is based on an actual house in Seaside, although I don't want to reveal the location to protect the new owners' privacy," Eskue Ousley said.

When they checked out the house, the first thing they saw was a dead rat in the kitchen sink.

"I thought, 'Wow, that is really bizarre,'" she said. "There was a story behind the rat and this house; there are little things that people leave behind. You wonder: Who lived there? What was their story? Because I'm a horror fan, I think, 'Where is the body buried?'"

#### Delving into darkness

"Pitcher Plant" tells the story of Tawny Ellis, a woman who spots a fixer-upper in Seaside, and, with her husband, jump at the chance to own a house at the beach. The couple moves in, along with their daughter, who begins to see an imaginary friend that bears a striking resemblance to the daughter of a drug-addicted woman who squatted in the house when it was vacant. Both former inhabitants have gone missing.

While Eskue Ousley enjoys delving into darkness, she has compassion for people who have experienced real-life horrors



COLIN MURPHEY/THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Seaside author Melissa Eskue Ousley's new book comes out this month.

**What:** Lunch in the Loft: author Melissa Eskue Ousley unveils her latest novel, "Pitcher Plant"

**When:** Noon Wednesday, May 17

**Where:** Beach Books (616 Broadway St., Seaside)

**Price:** \$25 registration fee, includes lunch with Eskue Ousley and a copy of her new book

such as drug addiction and homelessness. In fact, she has a master's degree in counseling.

"One of the characters is schizophrenic, but there is a supernatural piece within the plot of 'Pitcher Plant': There's a ghost, but I also wanted the reader to question which parts are supernatural and which are psychological. It was important to leave that somewhat open-ended."

#### 'Escape through writing'

Eskue Ousley's path to writing began during a previous career while she was doing academic research, which required a lot of work with numbers, data and analysis.

"It was interesting, but my brain needed something else to think about," she said.

"I love to write. It's what I do for fun. I could escape through writing."

Eskue Ousley started out writing short stories in college. Later, she was inspired by a writers' workshop in Cannon Beach. She also serendipitously met a woman from Portland — a "book shepherd," which is similar to a book agent but one who focuses on a specific book or job.

Together, they created some proposals, which culminated in the opportunity to publish her work with a small Pacific Northwest press. Her first book, "Sign of the Throne," became the first book in the Solas Beir Trilogy, a series that won several awards.

Her last book, "Sunset Empire," is a fantasy set in Astoria that blends history with local legends and features prominent

Astoria locations. The book debuted in a young-adult boxed set that became a bestseller in the UK. The novel was later released as a single volume.

#### 'Risk-taker'

"Each job is a chance for me to improve my craft," she said. "Pitcher Plant" is her fifth book, "and I feel that I've developed as a writer. It was the first time that I wrote a full novel in first person, and it was a personal challenge for me."

Asked if she found writing her first novel intimidating, she said, "I've always been a risk-taker, and if I want to do something, I go for it. I don't think too much about it. The first book I was writing for myself, just to see if I could. That sort of writer's high was driving me — 'Oh this is fun.' I thought it would be cool to be published, but it wasn't my main motiva-

tor."

Eskue Ousley teaches writing workshops and classes, and believes in giving back to the community. For each copy of "Pitcher Plant" sold the week after its release, she will donate \$1 of profit per book to the community college's Lives in Transition program, which promotes a supportive academic environment for students overcoming life barriers.

Despite her positive attitude and can-do work ethic, Eskue Ousley doesn't mince words about the challenging side of writing.

"Rejection: It's half the job, really," she said. "You have to just keep putting yourself out there, keep improving and stay persistent. I'd rather put myself out there and take the risk than never try."

