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Her first book, "The Other Door: Poems & Glimpses," was released in 2015.

McAuley's husband, local painter Robert Paulmenn, supplied the artwork for the front cover of "Nine Hundred Moon Journey." Christi Payne designed and formatted the book. The cover is one of McAuley's favorite works by Paulmenn, but it's actually the reverse image of the original. "I loved that painting," she said. "I wept when the original was sold."

While Paulmenn has his own studio, there was a time when the couple shared the same room — Paulmenn painting, McAuley writing. "We work really well together," she said. "We rejoice with each other, support each other and maintain that mutual respect."

McAuley credits Paulmenn's work ethic as inspiration for her own work. "Robert teaches me to go to work everyday. No matter what, he goes to his studio every day. His example is more supportive to my work than praise."

Visions of the coast

McAuley first came to the coast based on a vision she had of opening a used bookstore in Cannon Beach. She founded



COLIN MURPHEY PHOTO

Mary Lou McAuley reads from her new book of poetry at WineKraft in Astoria.

"McAuley's New and Used Books" in 1988. During this period, she made frequent trips to Astoria and fell in love with the Columbia River.

Still, McAuley said, "as soon as I got

the idea to open a used bookstore in a small coastal town I had never seen before, I just suddenly had another impression to go to the Southwest. I was sculpting stone at the time and was very drawn to the sculptures of the Southwest."

In 1992, she sold most of her possessions and embarked on her "walkabout" — a road trip around the country. Her dog "Banjo," a stray she had adopted a few years before and described as having "long legs, a wiry coat, a monkey tail and the sweetest disposition," stood in the backseat of her car "with his jaw resting on my shoulder the whole way," McAuley remembered.

The pair first headed to Santa Fe, where McAuley was appalled by the "dazzling abundance of the rich and the abject poverty of everyone else." In 1993, she and Banjo landed in Lake City, Colorado, the end of a yearlong road trip that she described as a time "I never felt so free or rich traveling through such wonderful country."

Banjo died in Colorado at age 16 and McAuley, emotional many years later, said, "I still miss him."

Pull of the river

McAuley met Paulmenn during her eight years in Colorado. "While I love the mountains, I missed the river," she said. "The river kept pulling me back. In the high desert there was never a cloud in the sky."

She and Paulmenn made their way west. "I knew I had to get back to Astoria," she said. "First to Bandon, then to Ashland,

Portland and then finally Astoria. We bought our house — just in time, we think — in 2014."

Once McAuley and Paulmenn were settled, she was drawn to the Astoria Library, which served as her workspace for writing most of her first book and part of her second. "I was there all the time," she said.

When a position for a part-time librarian opened up, she applied and got the job. McAuley's mother was also a librarian, and it felt natural to follow in her mother's footsteps. "I love talking to people about books," she said, "but we don't sit around reading all day, though, either."

McAuley's mother played another pivotal role in shaping her identity as a book lover.

"From early childhood, if I could read something and picture it, I would be captured. I would write and draw my own stories, which usually had the same plot as something I had just read." McAuley's mother played classical music frequently in the home. "I would listen to the classical music and tell my mother what I was seeing, and she said just go write it down. So I did," McAuley said.


Influences and inspirations

Jim Dott, an Astoria poet, retired elementary school teacher and author of "A Glossary of Memory," first met McAuley at a reading for North Coast Squid in Manzanita in 2014. She read her poem "River Paths" which appears in her first book. "I was immediately impressed by her clear, concise language and the insightful turn at the end," Dott said.

"What I admire about Mary Lou's writing is her ability to capture a moment and connect it to her reader in less than a page," he said. "Her poems reveal amusement, reverence and, yes, sometimes anger with the world. They are worth revisiting to savor a phrase or image — to reveal a deeper mystery."

McAuley has observed a tendency in our culture to focus only on the end goal. "It took me about two years to write this book. I try not to focus as much on the end product but more on the process of creating," she said. "We are, sadly, a very end-result-oriented culture."

Seeking approval is also a block to creativity. "One of the saddest things I see is regret at not having tried something. I think the hardest thing for me in the past is that if I didn't get approval from others, I stopped. It's taken me so many years to get away from that," she said.

McAuley's books can be purchased from any local bookstore as well as Amazon, Barnes and Noble and Riversea Gallery. 

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