

Portland author's new novel focuses on fresh starts

To be honest, I found the beginning of Portland author Marie Bostwick's new novel, "Hope on the Inside," to be fairly bland. But Bostwick is a New York Times bestselling author for a reason, and once the story gets into gear, it is a pretty engaging ride.

Things begin like this: Rick Carpenter gets home early from work one day and decides to surprise his wife by baking a loaf of rosemary olive bread.

But when Hope gets home from her job as a teacher of Family and Consumer Science (the new term for Home Economics), she is instantly on alert.

"You only make rosemary olive bread when something's gone wrong and you're trying to break it to me gently."

That's what being married to one another for more than three decades is like — this husband and wife, parents of four grown children, know one another well.

Rick spills the beans. Although he had taken on

THIS WEEK'S BOOK

"Hope on the Inside" By Marie Bostwick

Kensington - 360 pp - \$15.95

a crushing workload as the engineering firm he worked for transitioned to new management, he and some of the other senior engineers have just been unceremoniously forced into retirement.

There is a limited severance package, fortunately. But as the months go by, Rick begins to realize that employers aren't all too crazy about hiring a 58-year-old engineer — yes, age discrimination does exist.

Then Hope's school district faces budget cuts. Hope had only recently gone back to teaching after raising their own children. With no job seniority, Hope is laid off.

The couple has to face financial reality and make some drastic adjustments. They sell their beloved Portland home and downsize to a condo in Olympia, where

their daughter lives. But there's still the matter of securing work.

Hope finds something first — she gets hired to teach a crafting class in the local women's prison.

Working with this population is an enormous and stressful stretch for her and comes with a whole set of considerations she had never encountered before. The inmates have been traumatized in so many different ways, and Hope struggles to make her class relevant to them.

Gradually, she finds common ground. They, too, worry about their children and their families. They, too, are seeking fresh starts.

When Hope introduces a quilting project to her class, genuine bonding begins. But the project also introduces problems that Hope had been too naïve to anticipate.

"Hope on the Inside" pieces together several stories of struggles, setbacks

and small victories as Hope, her husband, her kids and her students all grapple with the vicissitudes of life.

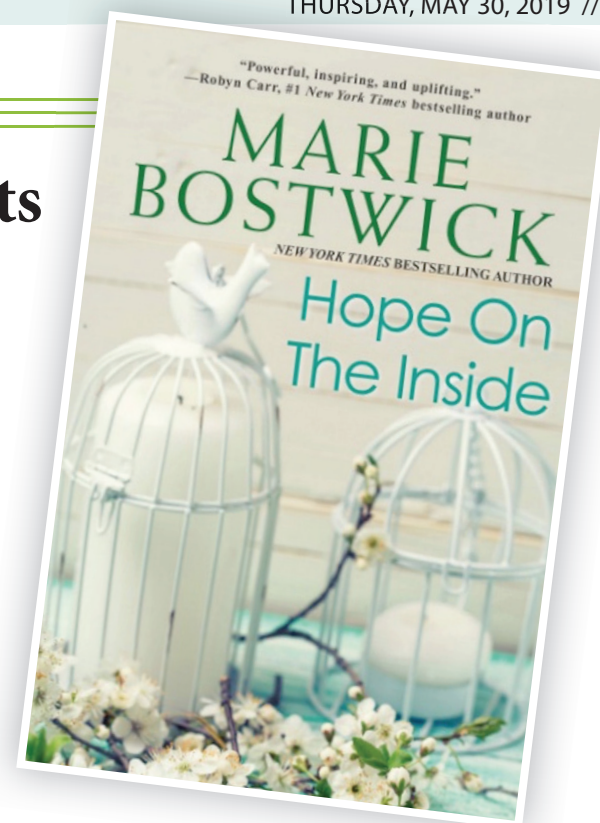
In the end, Bostwick's fans won't be disappointed. She writes about quilts, food and the healing power of creativity. The spiritual thread that underlies the story shows in an occasional, pertinent stitch here or there.

The author celebrates family bonds and brings forward various characters who offer different bits of homespun (or hard-won) wisdom, including the governor.

But Hope's mom offers perhaps the best advice: "Whatever comes your way, find the happiness in it."

That's signature Bostwick.

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at bkmonger@nwlink.com



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