

Faith-based books share settings, themes

Authors' characters strengthen faith through similar journeys

Two Northwest authors use Sonoma County's vineyards as the setting for their latest novels, both of which propound the Christian faith. And that's not the only similarity between these works. Both authors also incorporate the element of a vineyard fire that jeopardizes a family business.

Sisters-based author Melody Carlson is a veteran writer who has produced more than 200 books over the course of her career. Camper life is a theme that Carlson has incorporated repeatedly. In her newest work, "Looking for Leroy," middle aged elementary school teacher Brynna Phillips faces a lonely summer in Portland after a recent divorce, that is until colleague Jan invites her on a road trip in Jan's new camper.

Their plans to head to Yosemite get sidetracked on the Oregon Coast, when Phillips realizes that a campground they've stopped at had been the camp where she once had a teenage summer romance with a boy named Leroy.

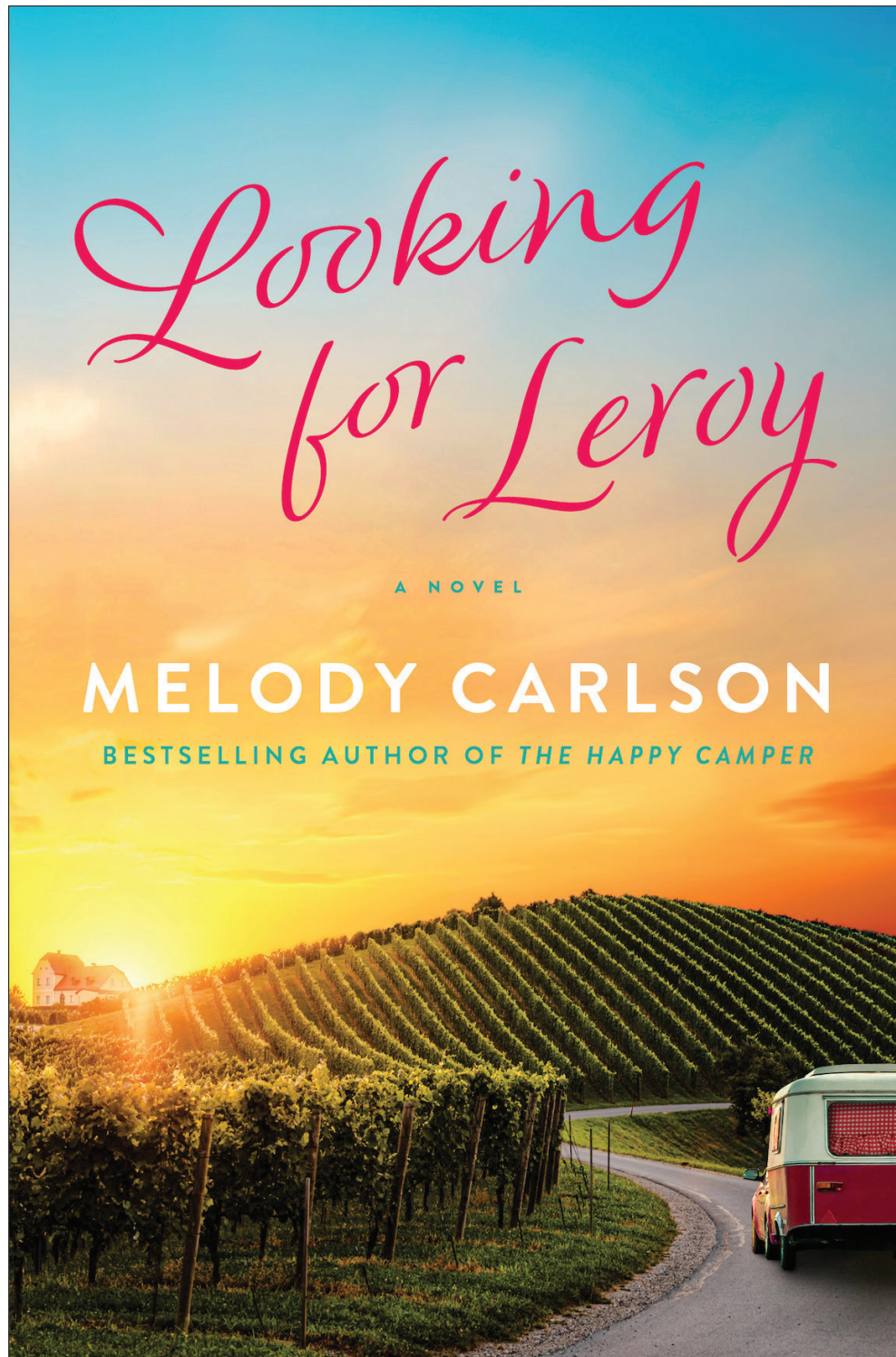
Inexplicably, Jan and another camper, a biker they've just befriended, now decide that they should locate Leroy in the hopes that Brynna can rekindle the romance. Despite Brynna's misgivings, the trio heads for Sonoma County, where the boy's family once owned a vineyard.

After a couple of days of wine tasting combined with searching for Leroy, the campers find a vineyard where Leroy is now, conveniently, a widower. His grown kids are helping him after a disastrous vineyard fire set the family business back, and one of his daughters hires Brynna on as office manager without Leroy's knowledge.

These two, although they're working on the same property, don't even meet as adults until two thirds of the way through the story. Another character suggests that Brynna consider the Biblical story of Ruth and Boaz as a guide for her decision making.

Although this is billed by the publisher as a second chance romance, the actual courtship sequence can only be characterized as whirlwind, and more of an exercise in humility.

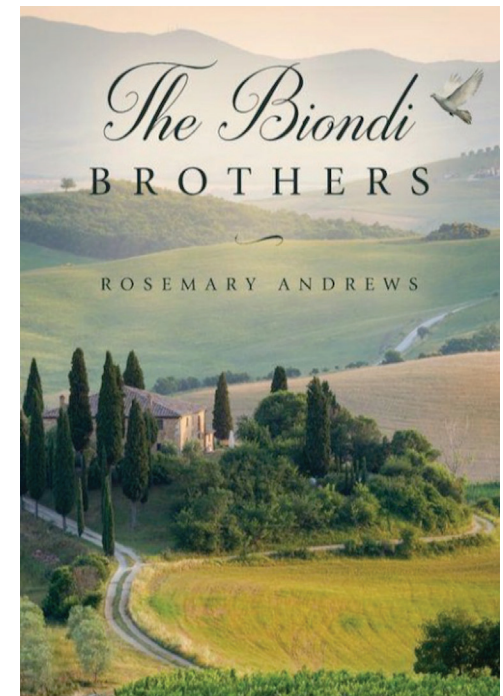
"The Biondi Brothers" has a little more dramatic meat on its bones. Ilwaco, Washington, author Rosemary Andrews weaves



'Looking for Leroy' is by Melody Carlson.

her story between three biological brothers and one adopted brother, all of whom work for the family vineyards, which are located in Sonoma County and Italy.

When the eldest brother, Jay, discovers that somebody has jeopardized the family business by concealing heroin packets in wine shipments from their Italian vineyard



'The Biondi Brothers' is by Rosemary Andrews.

This week's books

'Looking for Leroy' by Melody Carlson

Revell – 320 pp – \$15.99

'The Biondi Brothers' by Rosemary Andrews

Palmetto – 294 – \$17.99

to the United States, he suspects the Mafia is involved. His fears are borne out when he halts the shipments, and the family's vineyards on both continents are torched simultaneously.

Andrews relays this story in 79 short chapters, told from the perspectives of various characters. Each of the brothers grapples with his own set of problems, and Andrews demonstrates that none of them can attain true peace until they accept Jesus as their savior. Where Christian readers find affirmation, non-Christian readers may feel repelled, but the author does acknowledge other spiritual points of view.

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