



Astronaut
calls wrong
number/**9C**

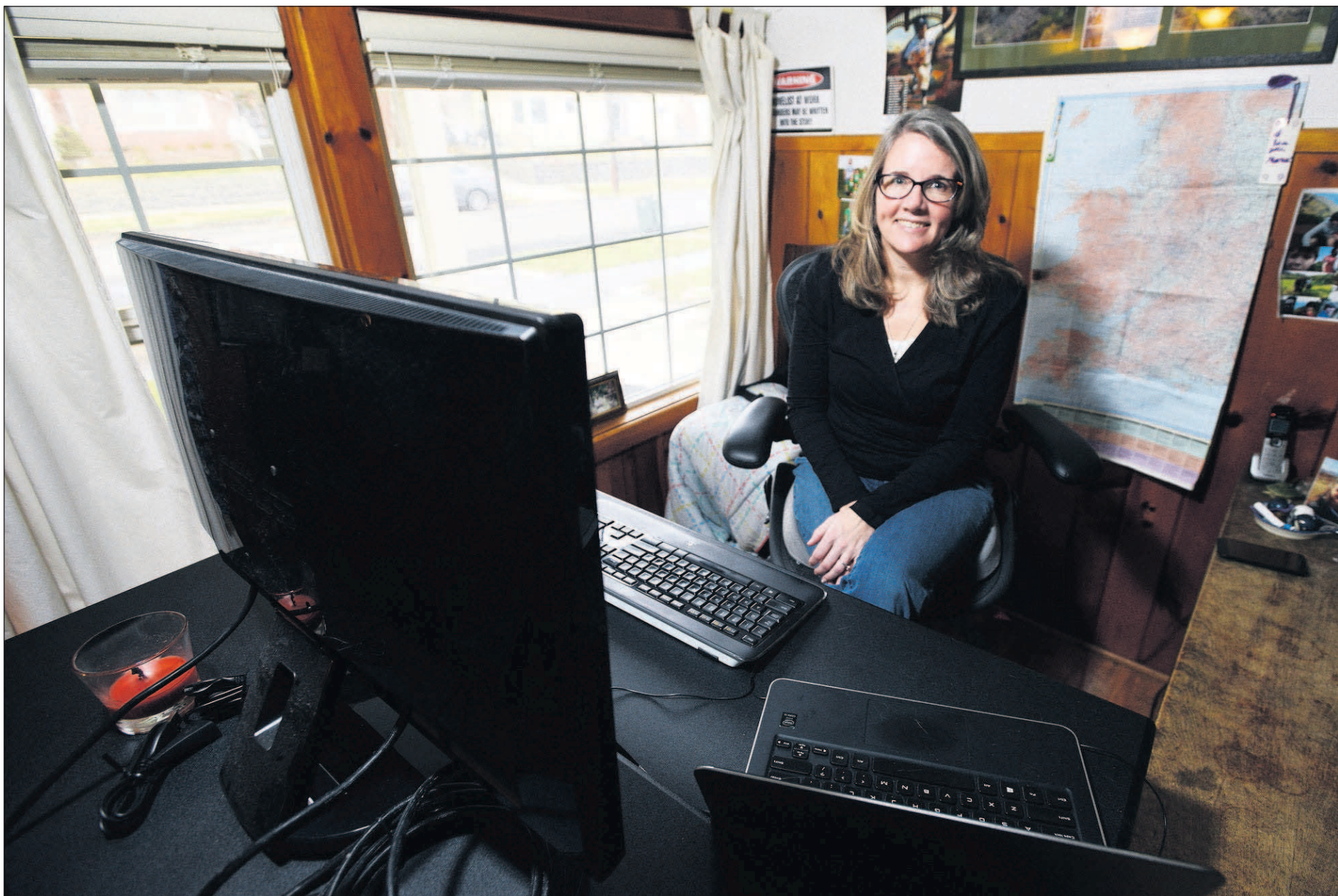


Johnny Vinyl
counts down his
top albums/**3C**



National parks
celebrate
100 years/**10C**

Magic of DIY



Staff photos by E.J. Harris

Sarah Woodbury is an independent Pendleton author who has sold more than 400,000 copies of her 21 novels since she started publishing five years ago.

Indie Pendleton author taps into her creative streak

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

Sarah Woodbury recalls bemoaning her lack of creativity back in 1992 as she tried to find a topic for her doctoral dissertation.

"I don't have a creative bone in my body," she told a fellow Ph.D. student.

In the years that followed, Woodbury proved herself wrong. The Pendleton woman has now written 21 medieval novels containing time travel, magic, treachery and adventure. The indie author has sold more than 400,000 books in the past five years.

These days, one will likely find the mother of four at home typing on a computer, her 17-year-old cat, Luke, sprawled between the keyboard and the monitor. A poster near her desk proclaims, "Novelist at work. Bystanders may be written into the story."

Woodbury writes every day, at least 1,000 words. The result is a steady stream of books and a large cadre of devoted readers who eagerly await each new offering.

Woodbury credits her children for her transformation from blocked Ph.D. student to prolific fantasy author. After college, Woodbury jettisoned plans of becoming a college anthropology professor in favor of staying home with her growing brood, which she homeschooled. As a full-time mom, she marveled at her children's imaginations.

"They were incredibly creative," she said.

Some of this creativity rubbed off on Woodbury. She tried poetry, gardening and quilting and, 10 years ago, "I decided to write a novel just to see if I could."

She finished in two months, writing during her youngest child's nap time. The result, she confessed, was "horrible" and "unsalvageable."

"I call it a trunk book because it will forever remain in a trunk," she said. "It's hopeless."

The next book went much smoother. The idea for the novel came in a dream in which Woodbury drove her 1995 Previa minivan to Wales to save the life of a medieval prince. In her book, a pair of teens are catapulted back to the year 1282 and into the adventure of their lives. The book is targeted at teens and young adults.

Selling "Footsteps in Time" to a publisher, however, proved frustrating. Woodbury submitted the book to agent after agent, collecting 72 rejections before an agent finally took her on. That agent and later a more high-powered one in New York were both unable to interest a publisher in the book. Woodbury just kept writing.

The publishing industry shape-shifted as she wrote, partly because of the economic downturn. The new terrain included the option of self-publishing

through platforms such as Amazon and iBook. After years of publishing houses dictating everything, suddenly "it was the Wild West of publishing" as authors jumped on the indie bandwagon. Woodbury decided to give it a shot in 2011, placing three of four finished books on Amazon.

"I just wanted to know if they were any good," Woodbury said.

That January, she sold 22 e-books — and that included three copies to herself and three to her mom. In February, she sold 52 and in March, 250. She decided to experiment, uploading the fourth book of her series, a prequel, and offering it for 99 cents. The strategy worked. Readers downloaded the book, read it and decided to buy others. In April, she sold 1,200. The total was 30,000 by the end of the year. The books, aimed at a young adult audience, attracted a wider demographic.

These days, Woodbury is grateful she never connected with a publisher. She controls every aspect of the process. She can sell her books for a low \$4.99 and still make more profit than an author going through a publisher. Her husband, Dan Haug, quit his job directing the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation Office of Information Technology to do much of Woodbury's editing (plus the laundry) and son Carew took on other necessary administrative work. Woodbury was free to write.

The author's love affair with Wales is apparent in her work. Woodbury's passion for the Celtic country was cemented as she and her daughter, Brynne, learned about their family's Welsh roots while studying genealogy as a homeschooling project. Woodbury loves the nation's beauty and especially its history.

"The history of Wales is full of treachery and betrayal and infighting," she said. "There's lots of material there."

Her daughter and three sons — Brynne, Carew, Gareth and Taran — all have Welsh names.

Woodbury has honed her writing process over the past decade. She has learned not to wait for inspiration.

"Writing 1,000 words a day is not about inspiration," she said. "Even if I have no clue what's going to happen next, I start writing. Crazy stuff happens. It just comes out of my fingers. You just have to sit and write."

She has learned to write amid the noise of life. Her desk sits in a corner of the living room in the thick of family activity. "I work," she said, "in chaos."

Husband Dan Haug has known Sarah since high school in Tumwater, Washington, where she was voted "Most Likely to Succeed" and class valedictorian, so he isn't surprised by her success. He marvels, however, at her creativity and ability to concentrate

with noise and activity swirling around her.

"She wrote her Ph.D. dissertation with two children under the age of four," Haug said. "She would sit on the sofa with her laptop while they watched 'Sesame Street.'"

Haug attributed some of Sarah's success to her ability to look at the big picture.

"She sees what has to be done to move forward," he said. "She doesn't get bogged down in the little details."

Woodbury knows not everyone is a fan of her genre, but she doesn't seem fazed.

"If you don't like medieval mysteries, don't read my books," she said.

But plenty of readers love Woodbury. She gets fan mail that warms her heart, including one letter from a reader who said Woodbury's stories had made her love reading again.

As an indie author, Woodbury had to find people she could trust to test ideas and provide copy editing. Husband Dan and 22-year-old son Carew provide the brutal honesty she requires. She writes about 12 drafts of each 80,000-word book and lets Dan see them after the first two drafts for an early opinion.

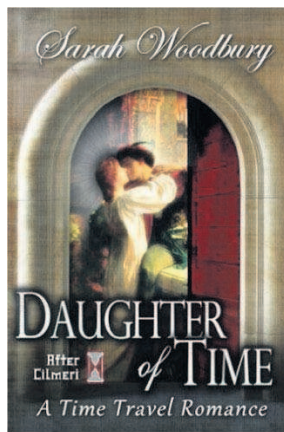
"It's important to have someone who is able to tell you the truth," Woodbury said. "You have to listen and take criticism."

When Dan or Carew tell her the pacing is off or a character is lacking, she stomps around for a bit, then reworks the book. She has never been sorry.

Her books are available at Smashwords, Barnes and Noble, Amazon, iBooks, Kobo and Google Play. The "After Cilmeri" series is available as audio books found at Audible, Amazon and iBooks. Woodbury gave the narrator a crash course in Welsh pronunciation before the recording sessions.

Looking back at her life, Woodbury said she is grateful.

"I've been incredibly lucky, there's no doubt," she said. "I've got the best job in the world."



"Daughter of Time" and "The Good Knight," the first books in their respective series, are free to download through Amazon and iBooks.