

**Siuslaw News**  
P.O. Box 10  
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# Opinion

## EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE

CATHERINE J. ROURKE  
For the Siuslaw News

# Ellen Gunderson Traylor



Most aspiring authors dream of publishing a book, hoping it will become a best seller. For one young college student named Ellen Gunderson Traylor, publication was the last thing on her mind when she dove into writing her first book with gusto in 1967.

"You write because it's in your blood, not because you want to get published," she said. "For me, writing is a joy and never a chore."

The Florence author turned that passion into 20 published works and two best-sellers, all featuring notorious biblical personalities in sweeping fictional accounts.

To date, this prolific storyteller has sold more than 2 million copies of her best-selling books, earning the title of "America's Foremost Biblical Novelist." Open any of Ellen's tomes to meet colorful portrayals of Moses and Mary Magdalene, Samson and Abraham, Jonah and Joseph and Joshua, with all their human flaws and follies.

"I wanted to breathe real life into these characters by showing their human emotions," Ellen said. "The drama of fiction makes the Bible come

alive for modern-day readers. When they bond with the characters, readers can participate in the story."

What inspired Ellen to pen such vast epics — mostly by hand, in an era before computers — when the Bible already recounts them?

"I felt a burning desire to tell these stories in a way that's never been done before, with authenticity and accuracy, but without deviating from Scripture," she said. "I just

wanted to add rich detail and imagination to what those scenes might have actually felt like."

But this was no easy task as Ellen faced years of monumental research. Amazingly, she juggled this Herculean literary endeavor with her roles as a single mother and teacher, similar to another epic author, J.K. Rowling of the "Harry Potter" fantasy series. And, just like Rowling, Ellen's historical fiction delights all ages and is often compared to the works of Tolkien and C.S. Lewis.

"I don't just assemble characters in historical costumes and settings," Ellen said. "There's a huge difference between legitimate historical fiction and historical fantasy. It's painstaking labor that involves 75-percent research. My top sellers offer a fantasy element, and that's what appeals to many readers."

Ellen's archaeology, journalism and English studies at the University of Oregon and Eastern Washington University proved handy, as well as her knowledge of Scripture.

"My books took years to complete mostly because of the in-depth research involved," she said. "That's why historical fiction is the most challenging kind to write. You have to create characters that feel authentic to the time period. The writing is the easy part."

**"Writing is like breathing. ... You write because you can't live without it."**

—ELLEN TRAYLOR

Despite digital technology spawning Nooks and Kindles with Twitter-length stories, Ellen's classic novels still captivate eager audiences. Letters pour in from readers detailing how her books have changed and even saved their lives. According to Ellen, one reader talked about being close to suicide but chose to go on living after reading a crucifixion scene.

"Readers tell me they can relate to my characters," she said. "They offer people hope, which is what the Bible is all about."

In many ways, Ellen's stories are cinematic.

"I visualize the scene as if I'm watching a movie," she said. "I put on paper what I'd like to see on a screen. While movies passively fill the imagination, a book opens a dimension for readers to bring in their own. When you read a book, you have to participate; it makes you think."

Still, how does Ellen find the time to write, research and "imagineer" tales spanning hundreds of pages?

"Writing is like breathing," she said. "You don't quit breathing because you're raising kids, and you don't quit raising kids because you're breathing. You write because you can't live without it."

According to Ellen, it never dawned on her that she could make a living as a writer. Yet she survived as a novelist while raising her children after her first marriage ended.

"The greatest challenge of my life has also been my greatest joy," she noted, "and that was raising two boys as a single mom on a writer's income. I was on my knees a lot, but I wouldn't trade it for anything."

Perhaps that also explains why some books took years to complete. She just released her latest book, "The Cornerstone," in March after 15 years in the making. As the third book in the "David Rothmeyer" series, the adventure story portrays current events in the Middle East in light of fascinating biblical prophecies. Ellen describes it as "the Hatfields and McCoys on steroids."

Another contemporary work, "A Bridge Back — The Early Days of Florence, Oregon," reflects her lifelong passion for history.

Ellen grew up in "a tight-knit community of teachers, preachers and writers" that set the foundation for her work as a writing and jour-



PHOTO BY CATHERINE ROURKE

**Ellen Traylor of Port Hole Books and Publishing has written 20 novels.**

nalism teacher, magazine and newspaper correspondent, public speaker and TV-radio talk show host. Her attempts to publish her first book met with the usual rash of rejections. However, she notes that every rejecting publishing company eventually bought the secondary rights to her books.

"That's why I encourage writers to be persistent and never give up," she said.

Ellen never gave up on love either. She moved to Montana with her second husband, Richard, who helped her renovate a historical church into a bookstore that she operated for 13 years.

In 2006 the couple moved to Florence where she opened Port

Hole Books and expanded it into a publishing operation. Now married for 26 years, Ellen and Richard divide their time between Florence and Montana. Her vision is to create a writers colony at the Port Hole Center in Gardiner, which includes a bookstore and meeting space for group events.

"I started writing as a child and always loved it," she said. "I'm not stopping now."

*Catherine J. Rourke is an award-winning writer, journalist and book editor who teaches creative writing at the Florence Regional Arts Alliance. She may be contacted at CJReditor@gmail.com.*

## LETTERS

### Similar experience

As I read and enjoyed the article about the 1953 Chevy written by my friend, Cal Applebee, ("Chevy Bel Air," March 9, B3) I was reminded of my own similar experience with a 1954 Ford at about the same time.

The 1954 Ford was purchased in San Jose, Calif., in 1960. It had a 239ci Y block V8 and 3-speed column shift with overdrive. It would be a rare car today as it was the Sunliner with the Plexiglas Insert in the top. It looked great, but on a warm, sunny day it was like sitting in a hot greenhouse.

I drove this car with reckless abandon — I really am lucky to have survived — until the engine lost a rod through the side of the block. So, I replaced the engine with a 312ci Y block from a 1957 Fairlane — 130 HP to 250 HP. Now, by the standards of the day, I had a fast car! Of course, the transmission and drive line could not handle the increased power. Brakes then seemed to be an "after thought."

I rapidly discovered it was easier to replace the transmission with a junkyard unit than to repair it. Soon there was a growing pile of broken transmissions, pinion gears and burnt out clutch facings behind my dad's garage.

Needless to say, he did not look upon that pile favorably. I finally sold the 1954 Ford for \$200, and probably prolonged my life!

John Machi  
Florence

### Great expectations

I am writing today to share an experience I had on March 29 at the new Clawson's Wheelhouse Family Dining. When my family pulled up to the restaurant, the parking lot was full. We could see into the building that the tables were full as well. Being the second day open, I was very happy to see the turnout.

As we walked in, we were greeted by a waitress with a big smile welcoming us in and inviting us to sit where ever we wish. As we made our way to a table, the decor caught my eyes. It has been transformed into a clean family-style dining restaurant. New tables, the decor, the walls have fresh paint, all very welcoming.

I could see that many patrons had not been served yet and I knew at this moment it would be a longer than normal wait time for our dinner. Many people in Florence had the same idea, "let's try the new place," as my husband put it.

At this time I would like to put this into perspective. This was day two, and more than like-

ly they had only been open to the public for no more than 20 hours. New team, new equipment, new menu, new everything.

As Americans we have grown to expect instant gratification. We want excellent customer service at all times, even though most do not give that level of customer service in their own line of work. We want our food hot, we want our movies now — no waiting for anything. We have no sympathy for our fellow man, no compassion to the young person on their first day on the job. No empathy for anyone.

I sat there in the corner of the room and watched very rude, very demanding customers belittle the staff who were obviously doing their best — on day two.

Our food did take longer than normal time and that's OK. In a world that is going by too fast, sitting there with my family, we talked and enjoyed each other. If they had been open for several months, then yes, I would question the skills of the staff, but not on day two.

After we were done, I thanked the staff and headed home. I went online and became angry at the outright obnoxious reviews. All I have to say is shame on you. How dare you criticize a new business that has not been given a single chance to work out all the kinks. Can any of you

honestly say you have started a new job and had everything run perfect? Even when Disneyland opened its doors, it had no running water to the drinking fountains and they ran out of food.

I want to thank the Clawson family for taking a chance and opening up a local family dining restaurant. In a time of wages going up, not a lot of people will take this chance, but they did. They will employ local people. I will be back very soon and give my support to this family and their staff.

Dawnell Spencer  
Florence

## LETTERS POLICY

Siuslaw News welcomes letters to the editor concerning issues affecting the Florence area and Lane County. Emailed letters are preferred. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed. All letters should be limited to about 300 words and must include the writer's full name, address and phone number for verification. Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity.

Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received. Libelous and anonymous letters as well as poetry will not be published. All submissions become the property of Siuslaw News and will not be returned.

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