

BEVERLY CLEARY • 1916-2021



Oregonian file

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Beloved Portland author created Ramona Quimby

BY AMY WANG
The Oregonian

Beverly Cleary wanted to be a writer. But first, she needed a story.

She had thought she would begin her writing career with a story about a girl like the one she had been, growing up first in Yamhill County and then in Northeast Portland. "But when I sat down to write, no ideas came," she told The Oregonian in 2016, shortly before her 100th birthday.

"And then I got to thinking about ... a little boy when I was children's librarian in Yakima who faced me and said, 'Where are the books about kids like us?' And he was right. There weren't any," she said. Back then, "kids in children's books had adventures and went to sea and all that sort of thing, but there was nothing about just ordinary kids playing in the neighborhood."

She decided she would write about those ordinary kids — and the rest is literary history.

Cleary, who became one of America's top-selling and most-loved authors and whose books have become classics read by countless children, parents and teachers, died Thursday, her publisher announced. She was 104.

Cleary was perhaps best known for her books featuring Ramona Quimby, who first appeared as a highly opinionated, stubborn preschooler pestering her big sister, Beatrice "Beezus" Quimby, and their neighbor, Henry Huggins, on quiet Klickitat Street in Northeast Portland. The Quimby sisters and Henry ended up appearing in a dozen books, a 1980s Portland Saturday morning television series and a 2010 movie. Ramona and Henry are depicted in bronze in the Beverly Cleary Sculpture Garden in Northeast Portland's Grant Park, as is Henry's dog, Ribs.

A standalone book, "Ellen Tebbits," also is set in Portland, with its title character — the Cleary creation who most resembles the author, she has said — living on Tillamook Street.

In keeping with her desire to write about everyday kids, Cleary didn't shy away from subjects that were once considered too touchy for children's books: Over the course of the Ramona series, her father loses his job, her mother starts working, and Ramona ends up

going to a neighbor's home for afterschool care. Cleary won the 1984 John Newbery Medal, America's top award for children's literature, for "Dear Mr. Henshaw," in which a young boy copes with his parents' divorce and his loneliness at school.

Readers responded enthusiastically to her frank, sympathetic portrayals of American families: Her books have sold more than 90 million copies. She received a National Medal of Art in 2003 and was named a Library of Congress "Living Legend" in 2000, 50 years after publishing her first book, "Henry Huggins."

Making her success all the sweeter was the fact that her initial relationship with books was a rocky one. As a first-grader, she recalled, she struggled with reading, stymied by phonics, word lists and dull textbooks. "Until the third grade, reading was just something I had to do in school," she told The Oregonian/OregonLive.

Beverly Atlee Bunn was born April 12, 1916, in McMinnville, the only child of Chester Lloyd Bunn, a farmer who was the descendant of Oregon Trail migrants, and Mable Bunn, a former teacher from the Midwest. She spent her first six years on the family farm in Yamhill, where she developed the sharp observational eye every storyteller needs — "I remember every blade of grass," she told an Oregonian interviewer in 2008. Then her father, exhausted by the daily demands of running a farm, gave it up and the family moved to Portland, where he became a bank guard.

Young Beverly attended Fernwood Elementary School, now part of Beverly Cleary School, and Grant High School. Once she became a convert to the idea of reading for pleasure, she went through books at a rapid clip. They provided an escape from the deprivations of the Depression as a Grant student, she recalled in her 1988 memoir, "A Girl From Yamhill," she cringed at wearing hand-me-down dresses in the face of "snob-bish" cliques.

Books were also an escape from tense relationships with her mother and longtime boyfriend, both of whom Cleary described in her memoir as judgmental, critical and controlling.

Wirkkala

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Several people were prepared to testify for Wirkkala's defense that Ryder was "hypersexual" and aggressive toward passed out males. This and other evidence of "prior bad acts" was excluded from the first trial, and in January, Judge Randy Miller ruled it would be kept out of the second, dealing a major blow to Wirkkala's defense.

Following the lunch break on Friday, Wirkkala was sworn in. The jurors listened intently and took notes on court-provided legal pads.

He testified that as he and Ryder watched Super Bowl 47 at the Hideaway Tavern in 2013, there were no arguments or hostility between them. Afterward, Wirkkala's girlfriend, Rachel Rasmussen, drove the three of them back to the home she shared with Wirkkala, arriving around 8:30 p.m.

"I wasn't good to drive and neither was Ryder," Wirkkala said.

Ryder's blood alcohol level at autopsy was determined to be .23. Wirkkala's blood was drawn 12 hours after the shooting and a forensic expert determined his blood alcohol level was between .18 and .38 at the time of the shooting.

Rasmussen and the two children in the house went to bed between 10 and 10:30 p.m., and the two men listened to music, hovered around a computer and shuffled out to the back deck, where they smoked cigarettes. They talked about the Bend brewery scene, past life experi-



Luke Wirkkala, right, points to a diagram of the home where he lived on the night in 2013 he said he shot and killed David Ryder in self defense.

Garrett Andrews/
The Bulletin

ences — "nothing too serious," he testified Friday.

"Just typical drinking banter, really," he said.

As Feb. 3 turned to Feb 4, Wirkkala arrived at the "nod-off point" while seated on the couch, he testified.

Wirkkala claims he passed out and awoke to Ryder pulling his pants off him, then forcing him to perform oral sex. Shocked and scared, Wirkkala broke free and went to his bedroom to retrieve his shotgun. Wirkkala claims he commanded Ryder to leave and Ryder refused and instead charged at him, prompting Wirkkala to fire from 3 feet away, he told the courtroom.

With prior bad acts excluded, Wirkkala's lawyer, Thad Betz, led his client to discuss conversations he had

with Ryder about the latter's supposed taste for fighting and a violent arrest in Kentucky.

Prosecutor Kristin Hoffmeyer objected to the line of questioning.

"The defendant just testified he was so drunk he was seeing double and now we're going to listen to him recount conversations he had in detail?" Hoffmeyer said.

Betz countered that the testimony was critical in showing Wirkkala's mindset at the time he pulled the trigger.

"It shows an effort by Ryder to groom Mr. Wirkkala for a sexual encounter," Betz said.

The judge sided with the defense and allowed Wirkkala to testify about discussions about violence he says he had with Ryder.

Hoffmeyer began her cross-examination with the question: "It sure is good to be the last man standing in a case like this, isn't it?"

"That's not how I would describe it," Wirkkala said.

Hoffmeyer asked, wasn't it true he was the sole survivor of the encounter? Wirkkala responded that Rasmussen, her son and her nephew were also survivors.

Hoffmeyer turned to another line of questioning. "Let's talk about how much you had to drink that night."

A sidebar was soon called and Judge Miller dismissed the jury early for the weekend.

Wirkkala will retake the witness stand when trial resumes Tuesday morning.

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CENTRAL OREGON WORSHIP DIRECTORY

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