

Never judge a book by its title

'The Stone Diaries' a good discovery

By Cheryl Hoefler
GO! Magazine

Surprises often pop up in the unlikely-est of places.

That's what happened to me during a recent road trip to the East Coast. While stretching my stiff legs at an Ohio campground, I selected a copy of "The Stone Diaries" by Carol Shields from a rec room shelf. I'd never heard of the book or Shields, and was shocked to learn both have been around a long time.

Written in 1993, "The Stone Diaries" won a Pulitzer Prize and was Shields' first noteworthy work. Shields, who died in 2003, has a lengthy bibliography and a strong following.

I'll confess, despite the Pulitzer Prize notoriety, I almost passed on this one. A "diary" sounded kind of boring. I was looking for a captivating story.

However, "The Stone Diaries" was not a diary at all and proof that you shouldn't judge a book by its cover — or title.

The story is the fictional autobiography of Daisy Stone Goodwill Flett, from her unlikely — and one might say miraculous — birth on a kitchen floor in

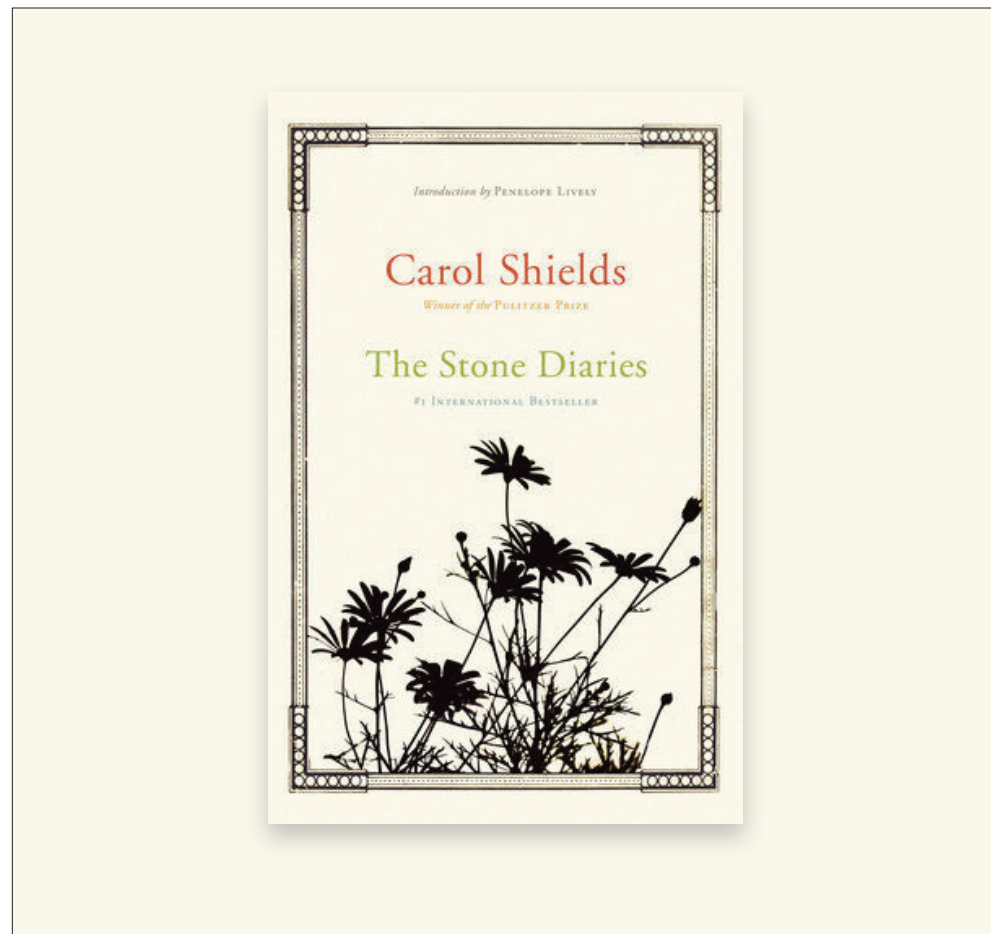
rural Canada in 1905 to her death at a rest home in sunny Florida some 90-plus years later.

Shields weaves a pretty darn good tale from the threads of one woman's mostly unremarkable life.

An ordinary woman, Daisy seems to be on a constant search for identity and purpose. She recounts the events and experiences of her life from both first- and third-person views; how and when Shields crafts this shift is hardly perceptible. At times, letters and accounts by others in Daisy's life offer contrasting perspectives and even a few revelations. Family photos provide a factual flavor to the story.

As I sped through the first pages, I realized the time frame was that of my grandmothers — who also had rural up-bringsings in the early 1900s — and I began to view Daisy in them, pondering my grandmothers as girls and young women. What were their dreams and longings? Did they also struggle for identity and purpose?

I guess these are quests we all wrestle with at one time or another, regardless of generation or geography.



Through the span of Daisy's life, readers are also taken on a historical ride across the vastly changing landscape and times of the 20th century in North America.

I'm usually happy to re-circulate books at random Little Free Libraries — or campground rec rooms — but this one I'll keep for awhile. And I'm on the hunt for more literary adventures by Carol Shields.

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