

Former senator pens first novel

David Nelson based 'Mariah Is Missing' on a true Montana crime

By Lisa Britton
Go! Magazine

PENDLETON — The story may be fictional, but the idea that sparked David Henry Nelson to write it came from true events.

He published "Mariah Is Missing" this month. It is available through Amazon.

"This is a fictionalized recreation of what happened," he said.

Nelson lives in Pendleton. He served as an Oregon state senator from 1997 to 2013, has dryland farmed for 45 years, and worked as a lawyer in Montana from 1967 to 1981.

His time in Montana inspired "Mariah Is Missing." In 1974, a schoolteacher went missing and was later found deceased. A man named Duncan McKenzie was arrested, found guilty of her murder, and sentenced to death in

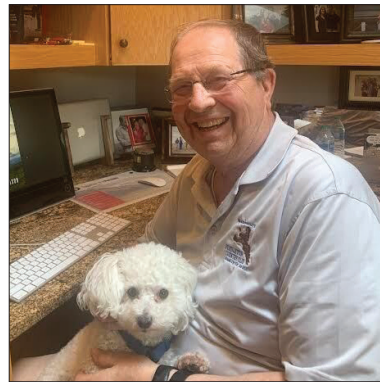
1975. He was executed in 1995 — the first person executed in Montana since 1943.

Over the years, that case has stayed with Nelson, who just turned 80. "Mariah Is Missing" is his first book.

"It's been eating at me all these years," he said. "I didn't grasp the significance of how many people it affected."

The novel follows Ana McGuire, a prosecuting attorney attempting to solve the disappearance of a young schoolteacher who is reported missing from her Monday morning class. Along the way, she navigates "a male-dominated professional world of law and local politics and tangles with a zealous sheriff and an egocentric county commissioner."

The book is described as a "suspenseful novel that offers a



David Nelson/Contributed photo
Nelson and his dog, Boo.

dramatic re-creation of the past and a fascinating insider view of what it's like to investigate a murder."

Although the story is based on true events, Nelson created fictional characters and towns.

There might be a sequel in the works.

"The way I left the ending, I left a lot of questions," he said.

He will participate in the First Draft Writers Series at Pendleton Center for the Arts at 7 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 16. For information, visit www.pendletonarts.org.

To learn more about Nelson's book, visit www.mariahissing.com.



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