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The business of books By Kate Rowland Of the News-Times



Carla Perry settles into her Dancing Moon Press office, in the loft of her Newport home. Hard at work helping authors get their unique stories into print, Perry rarely stops for a break some days.

(Photo by Kate Rowland)

The simple, ordinary process of living tends to produce some pretty complicated, out-of-the-ordinary lives.

Carla Perry, Newport's much heralded writer-in-residence, and her publishing company, Dancing Moon Press, provide services that enable budding authors to put their unique tales into print.

"For the most part, these are all individual stories that have some great meaning for the author," said Perry. "I offer a service to people who have an important story to tell."

Dancing Moon Press is a pay-to-publish company, meaning people pay Perry to publish their books. But that doesn't mean she'll automatically accept every project she's offered. "I don't take everyone's books," she said. "The book has to have some value. But I like to take on odd projects that would normally slip through the cracks of the publishing industry." The odds of making it in the traditional publishing industry are pretty slim, anyway, Perry said, and most of the authors she works with haven't even tried that route.

First-timers come to Dancing Moon Press because few publishers are willing to take on first-time authors anymore, she said. "Publishing companies want to be assured the book will be a hit before they commit to it," she said. "They don't accept books directly from authors; a literary agent must be the go-between."

If a first-time author is persistent - and lucky - enough to find an agent, who will earn a percentage of whatever the author is paid, it can often take another year or more to find a publisher. Once the book is purchased, it can take another year before retail copies wind up in a bookstore. "In fact, it can take three years from the time a book is accepted by an agent until copies are available - if everything goes right," Perry said. "And then the publisher has the right to change the title of the book and will design a cover with no input from the author. The publisher owns the copyright."

There are plenty of other drawbacks, Perry said, and Dancing Moon Press is a happy alternative.

Authors contract directly with Perry. Each job is tailored to meet the needs and budget of the author. “The author retains copyright on the book and has final say on the title and cover art,” she said. “If a manuscript is ready to go, it will generally take two to three months from start of project to completion. “Authors can determine how many copies they want printed - from one copy to 20,000.” Print runs of 1,000 or more can be done on a web press, which substantially reduces printing costs, she said, yet “the finished product is a high quality, well-produced volume.

“The author receives 100 percent of all money from sales, which means they will be able to reimburse themselves for their initial book production investment and usually make a little extra even on a run of 500 copies.

“Dancing Moon Press works with graphic artists for cover design, national book distributors and a webhosting firm that can get an author's book listed on Amazon and set up a website specifically for the book.

A measure of success

Some books published by Dancing Moon Press have had some measure of success. For instance, “*Salt in Our Blood: The Memoir of a Fisherman's Wife*” by Newport's Michele Longo Eder has already had a second printing of 1000 more copies -- after just one month, Perry said.

Eder said she's pretty happy with Perry, Dancing Moon Press, and her book. “Carla is absolutely wonderful to work with,” Eder said. “She's a talented writer herself and is knowledgeable about the publishing business like no one else. Her contacts in the Oregon arts community and beyond are super.”

“*The Area of Enlightenment: Don't Confuse Me with the Facts, I've Already Made Up My Mind*” by Oregon luminary C. Norman Winningstad was another of Perry's projects. Newport resident Winningstad agreed with Eder on Perry's valuable contributions. “Carla is one of my heroes in this world,” he said. “She's a very hard worker, and straight up.”

Other Dancing Moon Press books include “*The Book of Bob*” by Paul Chasman, formerly of Yachats. The book has been more than fairly successful, Perry said, It even garnered an inquiry from the Weinstein Company (previously named Miramax Films) about movie rights. The book is a humorous spoof on the Bush administration and organized religion.

“*Ghostwoman*” by Harriet Cohen M.D. details one woman's experience with the mystical. The book shares the author's story in the hope of illuminating the oft elusive path to wholeness.

“*Vicious Circles: A Story about Survival in a Czech Detention Camp*” made a huge impact in the life of the author, Elga Marianne Fuchs Huke, who is now in her mid-80s, Perry said. “It's a beautiful book,” she said. “Having her book produced changed Elga's life. She gives interviews, she does speaking engagements. She's a writer now.”

One upcoming book is “*Plague of Justice*” by Stan Turel of Bend, about the murder of the author's father by a business partner. Well-known crime writer Anne Rule, under a pseudonym, wrote an article about the case in “Official Detective Stories” in 1976, as the convicted murderer continued to file lawsuit after lawsuit - on the state's tab - from inside prison walls.

The art of writing

Recently secured in her home office in the loft of her Newport A-frame, black Lab rescue pup Mr. Jones curled at her feet, Perry reflected on her genuine love of all things literary - the writing process, the writers, and the resulting written art. “I enjoy all aspects of editing, page layout and taking someone's life story and producing a book,” Perry said. “It gives me great joy. “I offer a range of services. I can do any part of the process. I can take a recording or typewritten manuscript and transcribe it. I can just edit.”

With a smile, she added, “It often takes quite a bit of editing but I'm a kind, pleasant person to work with, and I sincerely love doing it.”

Perry's involvement in the writing community has been a longtime endeavor. She began her career producing technical manuals for Intel, then began a more freeform pursuit - producing and writing *Wild Dog Literary Magazine*. "Wild Dog was an exercise in learning to play with prose while commenting on my view of life as I travelled the country," she said. She was able to go that route because technical writing was financially good to her, she said. "By the time I decided to change direction, I only had to work a couple of days a week," she said. "I enjoyed technical writing, but I'd saved up enough money to travel for a couple of years.

"A friend and I lived in a camper van for a year with our dog, traveling around the United States. *Wild Dog Literary Magazine* was born from letters we wrote home. It's the humorous stories of our travels. I started sending it to friends and it spread by word of mouth."

When she finally left the open road, Perry found her old life had lost its appeal. "I returned to technical writing but I had been too free," she said. "I couldn't go back into my old life. "Portland was too large and I couldn't live there anymore. I ended up near the coast in a cabin on the Siuslaw River, then I moved to Yachats. I was writing a novel, and freelancing technical writing. And I began publishing a book-sized semi-annual international literary anthology called, *Talus and Scree*.

In 1997, Perry's brainchild, the Yachats Writers' Series, was born. The program thrived, and became so successful it was moved into the Newport Performing Arts Center and became the Nye Beach Writers' Series. "In 2002, it had outgrown a sponsorship role from the Oregon Coast Council for the Arts and we needed to create a 501(c)(3) nonprofit," Perry said. "I was the only person doing it before, but after it Writers On The Edge was created, we formed an energetic and committed board of directors."

Perry won an Oregon Book Award for her outstanding contributions to Oregon literature in 2002, and the next year, received the Governor's Art Award for the program's longevity and quality of programming.

Although she is still heavily involved in the Nye Beach Writers' Series, the awards brought a slew of offers for writing retreats that gave her the time and space to write in peace. "I was able to finish a novel," she said. She's in the process of sending it out into the world in the 'edgy young adult' category. "The book takes place in the 1960s in New York City, where I grew up."

Perry encourages people to call her about their book projects at 574-7708. Visit www.dancingmoonpress.com for a list of services offered.

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