

My friend, the writer, Nancy Rommelmann, likes to say that we know what we do, but we don't know what we do does. It is something we think about a lot, this ripple effect of writing, the way it starts out as an idea in a writer's heart and mind, and eventually creates a pathway into the hearts and minds of others. This is exactly how I think about the Manzanita Writers' Series. You know what you do Vera and Kathie, but you may not always know what you do, does. I am so grateful to have this opportunity to tell you and others in our community, what your series has done.

Back in 2010, I was living in Portland, and, while reading and signing books at Wordstock, I was approached by a woman named Vera Wildauer. She invited me to participate in the Manzanita Writers' Series, and in exchange for my appearance I was offered a weekend in a quiet house here in town—which is a generous gift for a writer.

I'm embarrassed to admit that I had never been to Manzanita before, and I'd lived in Portland for over twenty years. However, this only added to the delight of seeing this town for the first time in the context of writing and reading and books. It was love at first sight.

The fates and furies are a strange and fickle bunch, and who can say what drives them this way or that? But I distinctly remember a moment in that gift of a house, when a bird began flinging itself into a large window. Over and over it flailed against the glass, fell down, got up, and did it again. I had never seen a bird do that, and I assumed he was either attacking his own reflection, which he considered a threat, or he was in love with his own reflection, like Narcissus, and would soon fall to his death while in the act of making his move.

I took a break from the novel I was working on at the time, a novel whose ending I was struggling to figure out, and watched the bird, and felt that funny feeling of a creeping metaphor that was so on the nose it made me laugh. Here we are, banging our heads against a wall. Look at us getting nowhere fast. But then I realized the head-banging I was referring to, that is, the search for the story's ending, was only part of the struggle I was trying to figure out.

Who can explain how these things work? I can't and don't claim to. But what I do know is that in this moment of reflection, a sense of an ending came over me. I immediately understood where my character would end up, and I was offered a hint, like a folded message found in the pocket of a future robe, of how I might end up, too. That novel, *Things We Set On Fire*, ends in Manzanita, (which is a total giveaway for those of you who haven't read it). It is here that my character's life truly begins. And of course, as I stand before you, you can guess that my own life started over here, too. Now, my most recent novel is set here, the very first that was written in its entirety here, and the story it contains of the healing powers of the natural world around us is very dear to my heart.

But going back to before I moved here, I came to town as often as I could to work on another novel, called *Olivay*. And again, this was made possible with the generous support and invitation of this series with the help of lodging and a quiet place to focus. As a side note, there is a character named Vera in that novel, and another named Mrs. Hightower. During my visits I also became closer to the people who lived here, including Holly Lorincz and Chip MacGregor. As some of you already know—because I like to tell the story—I met them within minutes of each other the night of my first reading for the series, and I was the one who introduced them to each other at what used to be the wine

bar, which is now the whiskey bar that they own, a place where they serve a whiskey called Writers' Tears.

The Fates and Furies are a busy bunch, too.

While many things in life can easily be chalked up to coincidence or chance, what is indisputable is what happens when people live with intention. When you dream of something richer and bigger than yourself, and you work hard to turn it into a reality, something more than you bargained for, happens. The relationship between art and civic calling is bountiful with purpose and joy. It is a cross-section of where our lives find meaning. And, like writing itself, the writers' series serves as a bridge for such connections, and the flow on that bridge goes both ways. What begins as an offer to enrich a community becomes a writer's idea for a story, which becomes empathy in a reader's mind and heart, and someone somewhere, ends up feeling closer to the world at large, and therefore less alone. That someone also turned out to be me.

The Manzanita Writers' Series isn't just about bringing writers and books into our lives and enhancing our community, though it is certainly that in all of its excellence. But the ripples that go beyond cannot always be measured or seen, and unless someone tells you, you may never know what you have done. So, I am here to say thank you, Vera and Kathie, for your brainchild. It opened a door in my life, which opened another, and another, and within those many doors, my children, my husband and his children, our friends and the characters in my novels have all stepped through, and every bit of it began with you. You did this, along with your troupe of amazing volunteers, and I can never thank you enough.