

On an October afternoon two years ago, I pulled into Manzanita, ready for my reading that night at the Hoffman Center. OK, so I lie. I say I was ready, but I'm never really ready. I'm eager (kind of). Hopeful. Grateful. And, usually a nervous wreck.

I had learned in the fall of 2014 that independent publisher Red Hen Press would publish my novel, *Wander*, in the fall of 2016. I was sitting on a beach in Mexico the spring before my launch date when my publisher asked if I'd do a reading in New York City. My roller coaster stomach started that same afternoon and continued from then on, as did my quest to get over this hideous sense of stage fright. I read Amy Cuddy's book, "Presence: Bringing Your Boldest Self to Your Biggest Challenges," and learned about the Wonder Woman, and 'Starfish Up,' poses, both representing the concept that if you make your body bigger, your mind will follow. Act confident and you'll believe it. I bought a starfish pendant and earrings. I practiced Wonder Woman, hands on hips, legs firmly planted. I took my two-mile morning walk listening to a motivational speaker. I joined Toastmasters, which met at the ungodly hour of 7 a.m. I even downloaded a meditation app for my cell to help me chill.

Mind you, these were the happiest days of my life. My dream come true. I had a book. I was a published novelist! In the midst of it all, as I tried to make sense of what the hell was wrong with me, I realized that as a journalist I can and have and will approach anyone—anyone!—without an ounce of unease. I have a story to write, questions to ask, a deadline to meet and that's all I care about. But me, on stage, alone. Deer in the headlights time. It's just not natural.

So, the great *Wander* book tour began. I read at a coastal winery, in New York City in a basement bar on a stage for jazz musicians, and in Hershey, PA for the hometown crowd. It was an amazing adventure, and as stressful as anything I'd done. As my niece told my sister post New York City, "Mom, she was a hot mess."

Now, here I was, thrilled to be invited—thanks to my self-appointed patron, David Dillon, to take the stage in another hometown of sorts. Home here in on the Oregon Coast is Newport. My second home, in a manner of speaking, is a Manzanita motel.

Manzanita is the place we come to for New Year's Eve, for birthday celebrations and for an escape any time we just need to get away. I came to Manzanita to mourn the passing of my father, and the unexpected sudden death of my dog. And when my oldest friend on the planet came to Oregon to celebrate our birthdays, you bet,

Manzanita was on the itinerary. We have our routine: taco salads and burritos at Left Coast, drinks at the Sand Dune, calzones from Marzano's, and once upon a time, a plate of salmon and cheese from Vino, now MacGregor's Whiskey Bar, (where Chip promises to teach me to drink Scotch). So yes, a dog-friendly room in an ocean-front motel in Manzanita is the closest thing I have to a second home and a place I was proud to share *Wander*.

I had friends coming to the reading—a woman who, early in my journalism career, was my publisher at a Colorado magazine, and a fellow writer who I'd shared a stage with at my very first reading, and all sorts of people who knew me from my days when I was "Lori Tobias with The Oregonian."

I so didn't want to make a fool of myself.

That evening, fortified with a bit of wine and endless reminders about Starfish Up and Wonder Woman, I arrived at the Hoffman Center. Outside, a Meet the Author sign bearing a painting of my novel jacket by Lori Dillon welcomed me inside. There was a shooting star by the painting, and while I didn't feel like a star, I did feel like a published novelist, with a case of the jitters, of course.

The audience took their seats and I made my walk to the stage. Oh, how I wanted to rock it. I wanted to be someone worth these people's time. I wanted to be sure and proud and yes, a little bit Wonder Woman. I glanced over the pages I would read, knowing that when I opened my mouth, the voice that emerged might very well be wobbly with nerves. And that the more I tried to overcome it, the worse it would get. And that my mouth might get so dry it would feel seasoned with sawdust.

Then, I looked out at the faces of the people who had come to help me celebrate this lifetime dream, and they looked back, waiting, listening, smiling. Smiles that said, 'You can do this.' And so I did. And when I walked off the stage, I thought, you know, 'I could grow to like this.' And then I thought, oh dear, that could really be a problem.