

COUNTRY LIFE | FALL 2017

Along the Sylvan Trail

Transplanted author finds inspiration from Rocky Mountains to Mississippi River

Julianne Couch of Bellevue recently announced the publication of her fourth book, a novel based on characters connected to the fictional town of Sylvan Grove, Iowa.

Published by Jackson Hole, Wyoming-based Sastrugi Press, "Along the Sylvan Trail" tells the story of a loosely linked group of people from ages 4 to 94.

Although the action moves back and forth in time, it is all set within a 15-year contemporary timeframe.



JULIANNE COUCH

Couch explains that some of the characters call Iowa their home, while others live in Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado and Wyoming. These are places Couch is very familiar with, having lived in or near those states most of her life. In fact, Couch says she was inspired to write the new novel after the experience of gathering stories for her previous book, "The Small-Town Midwest: Resilience and Hope in the Twenty-First Century." Because that book was non-fiction, Couch presented her research and

interviews with people who live in small rural towns in a journalistic style.

But with fiction, Couch says, she was free to imagine a completely new world.

"Along the Sylvan Trail" dips into the lives of linked characters as they confront futures that are uncertain, based on the pulls of a hundred influences.

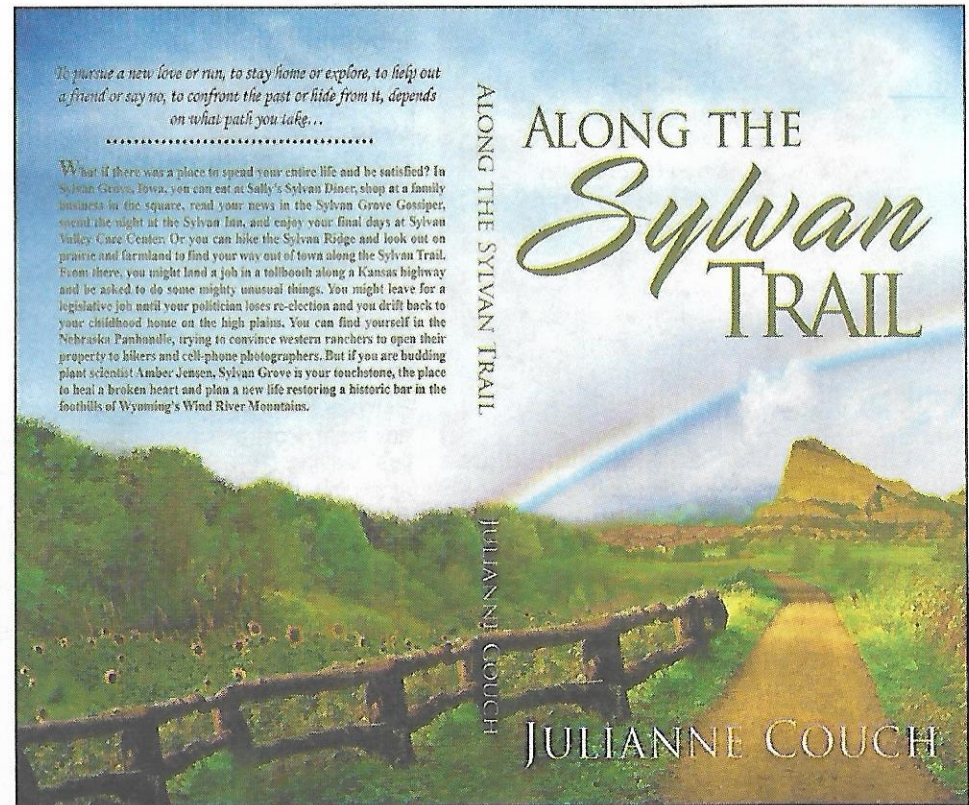
Couch introduces her characters.

"For example, we meet Cody Cole, a laid-off college recruiter for a big agriculture company about to start a job advocating for public access to private land in the Nebraska panhandle. We meet Toby Ellington, a former football star turned journalist turned legislative aide until his candidate loses the election. Then there is Dana Danhoff, the editor of a small-town Iowa newspaper who tries to take the town's future into her own hands. We spend a lot of time with Amber Jensen, a young scientist who understands how most things work except for her own heart. Finally, we meet the regulars at the Settlers Bar in Fremont, Wyoming, and spend a year at the foot of the Wind River Mountains sorting out who there to stay, and who will move on come spring."

Moving to Bellevue from Wyoming in 2011 gave her creative distance and perspective for her writing, Couch said.

"It took coming to Iowa to write 'Along the Sylvan Trail' and 'Small-Town Midwest,'" she explained.

"The Small-Town Midwest: Resilience and Hope in the Twenty-First Century" was published in 2016 by University of



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Local Bellevue author Julianne Couch published her fourth book, "Along the Sylvan Trail," this year.

Iowa Press. It received a Kansas Notable Book award for 2017. Her previous book, "Traveling the Power Line: From the Mojave Desert to the Bay of Fundy," published by the University of Nebraska, was

a Booklist Top 10 title on Sustainability.

Couch is an adjunct faculty member at the University of Wyoming and Upper Iowa University. She is also a freelance writer. ■