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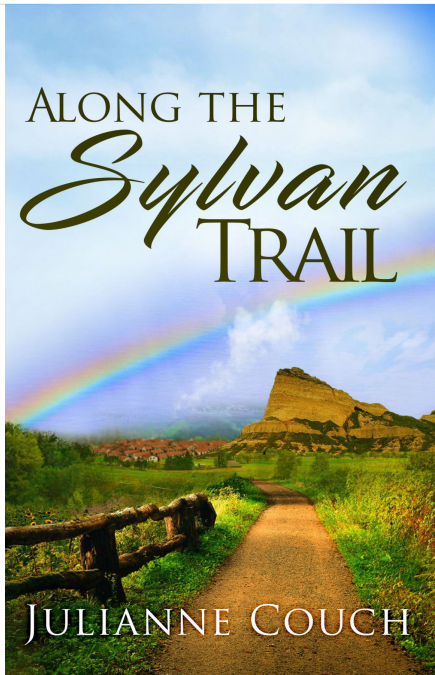
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Bellevue author pens novel about following your heart

BY ANTHONY FRENZEL tony.frenzel@thmedia.com Dec 24, 2017



"Along the Sylvan Trail," by Julianne Couch.

Contributed

BELLEVUE, Iowa — When local author Julianne Couch was working on her last book, "The Small-Town Midwest: Resilience and Hope in the Twenty-First Century" (University of Iowa Press, 2016), she was exposed to a variety of small, Midwestern towns and their people.

When you meet characters like the people inhabiting such places as Bridgeport, Neb.; Norton, Kan.; and Emmetsburg, Iowa, they tend to leave an impression.

"In (the book), I traveled around the middle section of the country and visited small towns and met fabulous people," Couch said in a phone interview. "And, I kept having this sensation that they were all still in my head when I finished. But they didn't want to stay in their own towns. They wanted to transplant with other people who might be like-minded in other areas. And, I thought, 'I've got give to them a chance to do that.'"



Julianne Couch

Contributed

That chance started out as a short story, evolved into a series of interconnected short stories and was finalized as a novel titled, "Along the Sylvan Trail" (Sastrugi Press, 2017) that was released last month.

It was the first fiction writing she had done in about 12 years.

"I had been writing so much nonfiction I thought, 'I'm going to take a break,'" Couch said. "When I was in graduate school — a million years ago — I did a lot of creative writing and I published a few pieces here and there in literary journals. I even had a short story in Modern Romance magazine, long, long ago. It was my first paycheck. I think they gave me \$250."

Stretching the creative muscles involved with writing fiction — in this case, a novel about a series of characters who are all connected to the small town of Sylvan Grove, Iowa — was something that she relished.

"(It) is another way to improve the writing I'm doing, regardless of what the genre is," Couch said. "It's finding a different way to tell stories and to think about description and place and pacing of events, dialogue quotes. It uses a different side of your brain. And, it was really worthwhile for me."

The book is available at most independent bookstores, on Amazon, Barnes & Noble and directly from the press in eBook and physical formats.

"The cover image is of Scotts Bluff National Monument, which is in the panhandle of Nebraska," Couch said. "In the very distant background, if you really look, you can see a housing development encroaching on that wild place. That's something that we all have to learn to live with or fight against in this growing world that we live in. A lot of the book is about seeking wild places and what the natural world means to the characters."

And, it's about following one's heart, she said.

"I hope (readers will) feel a sense of the friendships between the characters. I hope that they'll feel a sense of really following the voice inside of you that guides your choices, and trusting that you can make the right decisions. Other people might not believe that they're the right decision looking at it from the outside. Trust yourself, and know that following your heart is sometimes the right thing to do."

For more information, visit www.juliannecouch.net and www.sastrugipress.com.



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