

Beeton author rediscovers farming roots through rural children's books

Author Carolyn j Morris, a former teacher, used to show at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair in 4-H, but now she sells her books there and reads to young fans

Mar 21, 2019 7:00 AM by: [Miriam King](#)



Author Carolyn j Morris grew up on a farm, doing her chores before school, entering fall fairs as a 4-H Club member – but for years, her memories of farm life were tied to a sense of loss and sadness.

The death of her mother. The death of a best friend. The loss of a classmate.

It was only after marriage, the start of a new family and a decade of teaching in Toronto that she discovered a longing for “the space, the mature trees, the grain, the corn, the cattle... the sights and smells of my country roots.”

Moving to Beeton, Morris not only rediscovered those roots, but began to write about them – “writing and writing and writing” – creating a series of children’s books that capture the sense of what life is like in rural Ontario.

She shared her books and her enthusiasm at the March meeting of the Innisfil Historical Society, held appropriately enough in the Knock School Heritage Site, a restored one-room schoolhouse.

Morris spoke of her childhood, collecting bouquets of forget-me-nots, attending picnics and church, doing her chores in the barn before breakfast then rushing to catch the “big yellow school bus,” riding the hay wagon “pulled by the big old Percherons.”

Her first book was *Mourning Dove*, about young Billy Robinson who comes to stay on his grandparents’ farm after the death of his father.

“That story sat for five years because fear kills more dreams than failure ever will,” Morris said. It was only after years of hesitation and prayer that she said she took the plunge, hiring an editor, illustrator and printing company.

“I was on this very large learning curve,” she admitted, launching her own publishing company, Railfence Books. “I’m the CEO, the writer, the publisher, the promoter and, at the moment, the top sales guy.”

Mourning Dove was followed by *Barn Swallows*. Billy, a year older, returns to the farm and meets Gus, a young girl from a neighbouring farm. “I was just loving these characters,” Morris told the audience. “There’s a little bit of me in every single character.”

The Spruce Valley series continued with *Pine Warbler* – about 4-H and fall fairs – and wrapped up with *Chickadees at Christmas*, “a traditional Canadian Christmas.” All were set in the 1980s – a time, she said, when “there was a real sense of community, and no time to get into trouble.” Morris continued to teach kindergarten while writing her books – which is where she found her next inspiration.

Every year, she’d arrange to bring baby chicks to the classroom to the delight of her young students.

“This was a lot of fun,” she said. Even more fun were the ducklings: “They’ll imprint on you and follow you around. They’re so much fun, and they love to swim!”

It inspired her next series, *The Railfence Bunch*, about friends Chick and Duckling. Designed for younger readers, the books use rhyme, rhythm and repetition to engage little ones – still on the themes of farm and country life.

One of the most recent in the series, *Tapping for Sap*, is all about the sugar bush and making maple syrup. “Last March, they sold out at the Kortright Centre (during the Sugarbush Maple Syrup Festival) and they had to call me for more. It doesn’t get any better than that,” Morris said. After 32 years, she no longer teaches. “I’ve stopped because I’m too busy as an author and a speaker,” Morris said, noting she used to show at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair in 4-H. Now she’s at the Royal selling her books, and reading to young visitors.

At the Knock School, Morris shared her memories, read from her books, and handed out prizes of stuffed ducklings and rubber duckies to anyone who asked a question, shared a tale, or answered a challenge.

Asked how long she intends to keep writing, she replied, “The rest of my life! These books are just really fun.”

Morris sells her books primarily at speaking engagements, and at fairs, festivals and library events across the province. For more information, see railfencebooks.com.

The next meeting of the Innisfil Historical Society will be Saturday, April 13 at 2 p.m., at the Knock Schoolhouse, 10 Sideroad and Line 9 in Innisfil – one week early, due to the Easter holiday.



About the Author: Miriam King

Miriam King is a journalist and photographer with Bradford Today, covering news and events in Bradford West Gwillimbury and Innisfil
