

Renaissance Woman Keeps Busy By Writing Books

The Seffner resident recently published "The Distant Shore," a children's novel.

By DANN LAWRENCE WHITE
The Tampa Tribune



Coty
She finds time for piano instruction, a part-time job and clubs.

SEFFNER — It's not that Debora Coty can't decide what to do. It's just that she can do so much. And now the Seffner woman has added a new title to her résumé: published author.

Like a hummingbird collecting nectar, the 38-year resident flits from one activity to the next.

There are her regular tennis matches at the Brandon Sports and Aquatic Center, teaching private piano lessons to stu-

dents in her home and her part-time job as an occupational therapist. The wee hours of the morning are devoted to writing her books. In between, she finds time for her writers groups, Christian groups, the Friends of the Seffner Library, fundraisers,

church organizations, speaking engagements and presenting writing seminars to students.

Her husband, Chuck, who, after 29 years of marriage no longer tries to keep up with her, claims Coty is tireless. So he wasn't the least bit surprised when she announced five years ago that she wanted to be a writer.

"She's always done whatever she set out to do," he said at a recent signing for her new book, "The Distant Shore."

Born and raised in Starke, where her father, Frank, was

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in charge of the library for the state prison and her mother, Adele, was a schoolteacher, Coty said she was an avid reader.

"I was rabid," she said. "I read everything I could get my hands on. Every summer I would ride my bike to the library and fill the basket on the front of my bike with books and would take them home and devour them."

There was one book that stood out: Catherine Marshall's "Christy," about a sheltered city girl who, at age 19, heads to the poverty-stricken backwoods of the Great Smoky Mountains to teach the children of the mountain people living there.

"It just grabbed me," Coty said. "I read it nine times, and each time it touched me in the same way. I knew then that I wanted to write young adult novels."

However, life and love got in the way of Coty's writing ambitions. She met and married Chuck, attended the University of Florida, majoring in occupational therapy, and moved to Seffner 28 years ago to raise her family, including daughter Cricket, and son

Matthew.

There, she found her niche teaching piano to children for 20 years and performing and composing praise songs for her church, Bay Life Church in Brandon.

Then one day she was flipping through a magazine at her doctor's office and came across an advertisement inviting would-be writers to enter their stories in a contest.

"I gave myself a crash course in English and grammar, and then God told me to write a story about my house," she said. "It was about how we ended up with this perfect house, how God gives everyday miracles."

The story was rejected, but Coty had been bitten by the writing bug.

"I wrote four more pieces and, after many months, I got four more rejections," she said. "I was ready to pack the dream away, and then I checked my mail and I had an acceptance."

Since then, Coty has had dozens of articles published in national magazines and published "The Distant Shore," which was released Aug. 30 by Vintage Romance Publishing.

Coty said she knew she had found the perfect subject for her book when one of her therapy patients showed her his grandmother's memoirs

of life on Merritt Island. The woman was a Miccosukee Indian who lived on the island in the early 20th century.

"I knew the minute I got into the memoirs that this had to be the basis for my first historical nonfiction book," Coty said.

Geared for ages 12 and up, the story revolves around Emma Lee Palmer, a precocious girl who is banished to the remote island to live with her demanding aunt. There, she discovers explosive weather, native critters, a family secret and, ultimately, faith and unconditional love.

She said parishioners of St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in Seffner may recognize the benevolent character of Captain Stone in the book. It's based on her longtime friend, the Rev. Christopher Fitzgerald, pastor of the church.

"I chose an inspirational genre early on," she said, "because I believe God's fingerprints have been on my life. It's been amazing. There's no feeling like it in the world when you're in the path God has chosen and everything is falling into place."

But, instead of simply giving teens a good read, Coty decided to take it a step further in light of today's testing-

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conscious world.

The book has a "Break it Down" creative-writing instructional section in the back that includes application questions for each of the 25 chapters, addressing various aspects of creative writing, including point of view, voice, literary devices, dialogue, subplots, narration, dialect, character development and exposition.

Coty also makes herself available to present a half-hour PowerPoint seminar to students about the book titled "A Writer's Journey: Traversing Pinnacles and Potholes on the Road to Publication."

The book has been so popular that the publisher has asked Coty for a sequel, and she's asking her readers to help.

She's offering readers a chance to submit five subplot suggestions for the sequel, "Billowing Sails." There should be one subplot for

each of the main characters in "The Distant Shore:" Emma Lee, Aunt Augusta, Captain Stone, Julius and Sarah.

The winning subplot, to be announced in April, will be included in the sequel, and the new character will have the name of the winner.

In addition, Regal Books is set to publish Coty's book "Smiles to Go: Hugs, Humor and Hope for Harried Moms" in March 2009. Coty also is contributing a chapter to "Heavenly Humor for the Woman's Soul," to be published by Barbour Books in June, and she is one of three co-writers for "Grit for the Oyster: 250 Pearls of Wisdom for Aspiring Writers," set to hit bookstores in mid-2008.

"I'm just getting started in my career as an author, proving there's hope for all the late bloomers out there," she said.

To order a book or contact Coty about a speaking engagement, visit www.deboracoty.com.

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