

Carolyn McBride



Finding Joy in Transitions Through the Comfort of Traditions

We're in that lull between Christmas and New Year's, a time when I find myself reflecting on all of life's blessings this year. For me, 2024 began with so much angst, personally and professionally. And when you're a writer, it all seems personal anyway...and eventually ends up in a story!



In May, we were blessed with a new life in our family, my first grandson. My daughter has an autoimmune disease, so her pregnancy was high-risk and full of lots of ups, downs, and prayers, all of which were answered beyond belief. Being “Grammy” is pure joy, a role I could never imagine and one that reaches into areas of my heart I never knew existed.



As you well know, I had a couple of book babies as well. Sharing pieces of my heart with the world has been both terrifying and incredibly fulfilling. My [Potomac Shores series](#) was launched this year with the book I wrote in 2022, [The Cicada Spring](#), and a follow-on novella, [Santa Overboard](#), written as part of my master’s degree program in fiction writing.

This year Katie, Deke, and Belle have their own stockings on our mantel! (See photo above.)

Last week at an Italian market in West Palm Beach, my girlfriend and I met an 88-year-old woman as she loaded groceries into her Mini Cooper. She talked about her optimism for 2025 and her desire to read about characters at her same stage in life. She joked about writing a memoir called “Looking for the Off Switch,” focusing on all she’s found along the way AFTER the coming-of-age and career-and-family eras of her life.

There’s so much more to coming-of-*middle*-age and beyond, so many transitions yet to experience. And they often come with little surprises of how far you’ve come, like the Eisenhower pocketknife she found in the bottom of her purse, a reminder of the days she lived in Washington and campaigned for voting rights for the District of Columbia. She was born only

sixteen years after women got the right to vote, and she's still joyfully exercising her right.

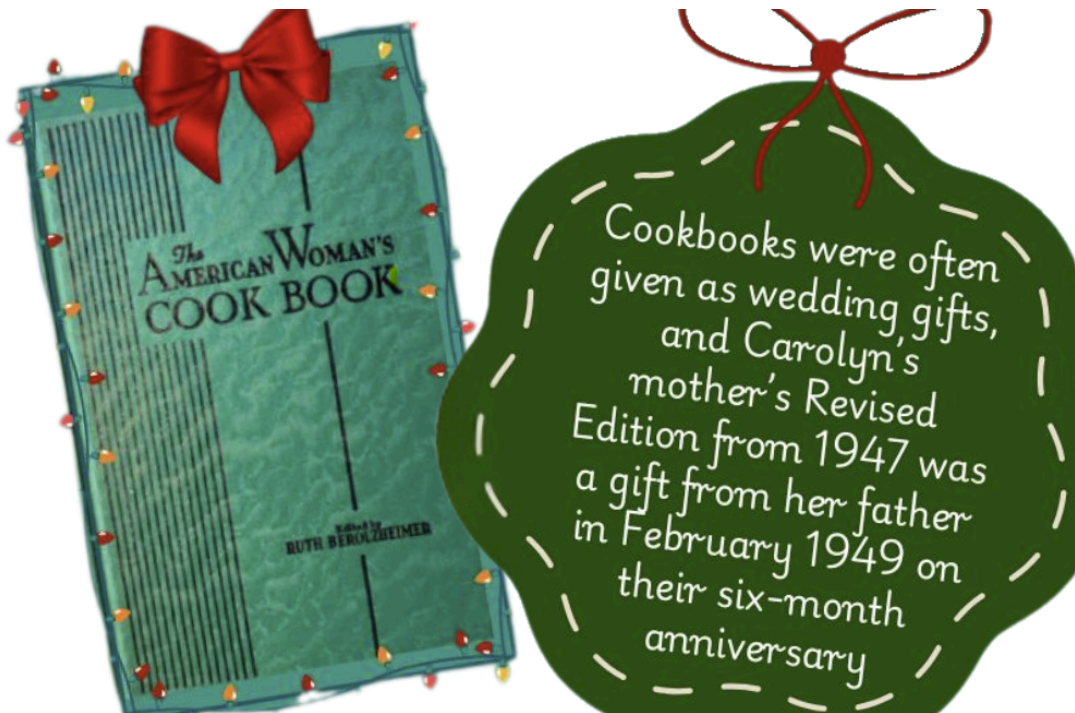


Yes, all this in a parking lot conversation!

And her name is Joy.

Of course it is.

I know not everyone is feeling joy at this time of year, and as I reflect on family traditions, I'm reminded of the family members no longer around the table. There are days when the torch that has been passed feels like a heavy weight, other days a heartwarming honor and gift.



My holiday decorations are mostly a comforting, mismatched hodgepodge from the past: my husband's knit stocking, my daughter's childhood Precious Moments nativity scene, my mom's lighted ceramic Scottish tree adorned with thistle. The recipes preserved in *Santa Overboard* are some

favorites from family and friends. Vivy's Book Club Besties in Virginia cooked up most of them for their December meeting!



Read "[A Recipe for Inspiration](#)" in BookReporter's Holiday Author Blog series for more backstory behind the book.

In preparing for book club meetings, I discovered some pictures taken during the holiday boat parade on the Occoquan River in 2010.



Amid the photos of the parade was one of my mom standing on the town dock in the crowd waiting for Santa's arrival, all bundled up and looking chic in her tortoiseshell sunglasses and scarf. My dad had passed away the year

before, and Mom had entered her 80s without her life partner, her love since the age of 16. But she clearly wasn't looking for Santa. She was waiting for her daughter and granddaughter on board our own boat, leading the parade.



Writing fiction has allowed me to capture memories like this one and weave them into new tales inspired by my own experiences. I thank you for coming along with me this year: meeting me at a festival, inviting me to your book club, posting a book review, sending me a personal note. In 2025, I will be working on my thesis (another book!) and scaling back my schedule a bit to accommodate more writing.

I'd love to see you at one of the events below and will always find time for book clubs, my favorite get-togethers. I hope my story and those of my characters inspire you to pursue whatever it is your heart is seeking, whether it's your dream job, a forever love, more time in nature, healing and hope...or all of the above! It's never too late to go after your best life yet.

(P.S. My next book title may be hidden in that last sentence!)



See the tundra swans this winter!

Join me in Lorton, Virginia, for a 1.3-miled paved trail walk on the Great Marsh Trail to see the tundra swans. They winter on Mason Neck, making an annual migration from their Arctic breeding grounds. If you've read *Santa Overboard*, you know how majestic these birds are. Go inside the pages and experience the romance and beauty of these creatures with Katie, Deke, and me in the Elizabeth Hartwell National Wildlife Refuge.

Jan. 18



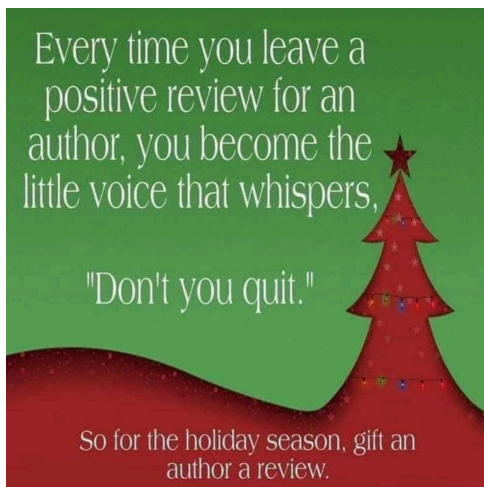
Meet the Sisters of the Traveling Pen!

One of this year's most unexpected and fulfilling "bookships" has been my collaboration with four other Virginia authors (from left to right):

- Jennifer Milder – [The Epilogue of August](#)
- (yours truly)
- Sharon J. Wishnow – [The Pelican Tide](#)
- Christine Gunderson – [Friends with Secrets](#)
- Barbara Boehm Miller – [When You See Her](#)

Each of our debut novels features resilient women navigating complex relationships. Get a signed copy at our next event at the Army Navy Country Club in Arlington, Virginia, and follow our [Holiday & Hearts Facebook group](#) for future book talks.

Feb. 5



Review It Forward

Track your reads,
share your book love.

Goodreads



End-of-Year Sale

A quick listen for your holiday road
trip, now half price!

More Events in 2025

[Full Calendar](#)



Williamsburg Book Fest

Williamsburg, VA

Feb. 22



Eagle Festival at Mason Neck SP

Lorton, VA

May 10



Occoquan Riverfest

Occoquan, VA

June 7-8



Read It Write It Book Festival

Wellington, FL

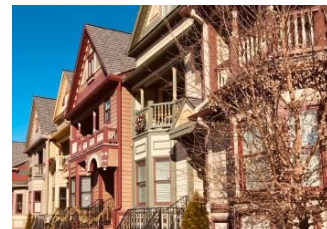
June 14



Stafford Book Fest

Stafford, VA

Sept. 14



Fall Arts & Crafts Show

Occoquan, VA

Sept. 27-28

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