

Romancing for charity: Author donates profits

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Westbrook author Dodie Milardo has done at least two amazing things recently: she's written and published a book with a non-writing background AND she's donating 90 percent of the net profits to charity.

Over coffee at the Paperback Café in Old Saybrook, the vivacious author of "Penelope's Cruise" explains, "Both the book and the charity work started at the same time."

How is it you can donate 90 percent of the proceeds to charity? "I have what I need, I don't need to be competitive. It's a really nice place to be. I'm very blessed that my husband and I have everything we need."

Previous to her new life as romance novelist, tireless charity volunteer and president of To Give Is Divine, Ltd. (www.togiveisdivine.com), Milardo has led a full professional life. Raised in Stamford, she's been a math teacher, small business owner, and corporate ladder climber: "I feel very blessed in my life, and I just try and do the right thing, and be a good person. I'm not perfect, though. When I was younger, my motivations might have been different when I was climbing the corporate ladder. But, I'm in a different place right now."

"So I started writing the book, and I also started volunteering for the Child and Family agency." Milardo flashes a dazzling smile, "It makes me feel really good to help somebody else," she adds, "And I'm very proud to say that the Family and Child Agency – the auxiliary in Old Lyme – gave me the 2008 Volunteer of the Year Award."

Before even talking about her book, Milardo starts with some statistics. For starters, according to the Connecticut Food Bank, 390,000 people in the state don't have enough to eat.

"How can we let that happen – in Connecticut? So, by buying the book, you enable ME to help some of these people – and you're helping indirectly as well."

Milardo also mentions that, according to State Rep. Diana Urban, (D-43), 35,000 children in Connecticut will fall into poverty – which will eventually cost the state \$800 million dollars a year.

"So, if you're not philanthropic, you might want to look at it from a different angle – and you can see that it's going to hit your pocketbook."

"We tend to react when something is of epic proportions – like the earthquake in Haiti happens, for instance. And Americans went crazy supporting Haiti. I'm absolutely thrilled that they do that, but I want to remember the people here that are hurting."

But the charitable donation side is only one of the twists. This book is Dodie Milardo's very first writing effort, other than writing emails and letters. Milardo doesn't worry that she may not be a great writer. She's a good storyteller, though. As a fledgling effort, Milardo's prose isn't as tight – or as self-conscious – as it could be, and that's the beauty of it. There are epistolary elements (much back and forth email correspondence); the characters are vivid and (mostly) likable; the humor and charm of the narrator, Gina (whose "gut" reactions are crucial to the storyline), along with a good instinct for creating and maintaining suspense, make "Penelope's Cruise" an engaging read.

Like Jane Austen, Milardo's concerns are love and money. Like Luanne Rice, she's a Connecticut-based romance novelist. The fact that Milardo is not at all pretentious and has a story that she felt she HAD to tell makes "Penelope's Cruise" a decent page-turner. And some very sweet things take place along with the not-so-sweet... there's a necessary balance that makes the tale pretty much believable

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The writing process for Milardo was all about inspiration, focus and dedication: “I went on vacation, and when I came back I started telling friends what had happened and about the experiences I had and they kept saying, ‘You gotta write a book! You gotta write a book!’ So it stuck in my head and I thought, ‘Maybe I should try writing this down.’”

“Writing the book wasn’t full time, but part time. It took me about nine months to write. I had a first draft manuscript of a start to finish story. And then I edited it for a while,” and the project went on hold while Dodie and her husband moved house. “Then I got back into it, finished editing it, then went to print in November (2009).”

In the process, Milardo consulted with lawyer, a copy editor and the editor of some Nora Roberts books. She decided to self-publish because more of the profits from book sales could then go to charity. As for the catchy title, it came about by brainstorming: “The original title was gonna be “Gypsy Dancer’s Gift,” but as you know, there’s a Penelope in the book, and the main character, Gina, starts by going on a cruise. So one day, I was kickin’ around some ideas about the book with my sister-in-law, and all of a sudden one of us said, ‘How about Penelope’s Cruise?’ And it was, why not?”

Why not, indeed? Author Milardo’s good ideas, combined with her infectious good nature, confidence, and seemingly energy to burn gave this writer ample proof that good things really can and DO happen to women over 50! (For more information or to order Penelope’s Cruise, visit her website:

<http://www.dodietalk.com>

To find out more,
read “Penelope’s Cruise” by Dodie Milardo.
And visit her website at www.dodietalk.com.

