

Tennessee Tearoom Owner Turns Mystery Writer

Readers savor mystery, tea tips, and recipes
with **The Traveling Tea Ladies.**

By Deborah Garrison Lowery / Images Courtesy of Melanie O'Hara



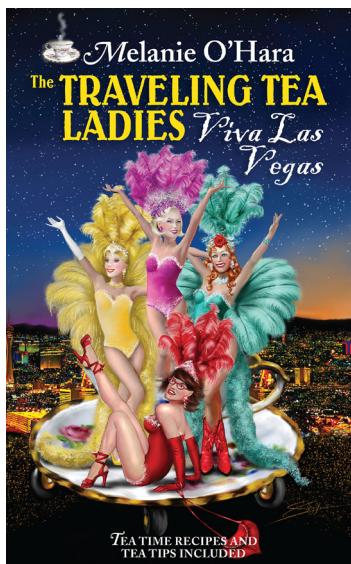
When she was growing up, Melanie O'Hara shared a pot of tea and conversation with her mom every day after school. Later, during dinner, her dad, a pathologist, talked about his work. Who knew that these two early life experiences would one day motivate Melanie to write a book series featuring tea-loving ladies and murder?

Inspiration for *The Traveling Tea Ladies* murder-mystery series goes beyond the author's childhood influences. In fact, story settings, characters, and even events throughout are basically a scrapbook of her life, blending local color from the places she has lived or visited, the personalities of friends and family, and even antics and unique guests she has encountered as a tearoom owner.

The series centers around Amelia Spencer, owner of the Pink Dogwood Tea Room in fictional Dogwood Cove, Tennessee, and three friends who manage to encounter and solve murders wherever they go. As the first book begins, Amelia struggles with the need to sell the 1904 Victorian house and tearoom—something author Melanie knows all about. She and her husband, Keith, raised six children in their 110-year-old Victorian home in Johnson City, Tennessee, where she ran Miss Melanie's Tea Room on the first floor until she closed the business in 2010.

Even the settings reflect segments of her life, from Dallas, where she attended Southern Methodist University (*Death in Dallas*), to Jonesborough, Tennessee, the historic town near her Johnson City home (*Death in Dixie*), to Savannah, her favorite vacation city (*Death in the Low Country*).

"I've lived all over the South," says Melanie. "And my characters and their adventures represent a lot of things you see here—strong women, strong friendships, and strong tea. I like to say that my books are where *Charlie's Angels* meet *Steel Magnolias*!"



As the only writer of tea-themed books with real-life experience as the owner of a tearoom, Melanie can say with certainty that the tea tips, recipes, and challenges chronicled throughout her tomes are authentic. Tips come from her training with tea guru Bruce Richardson and her experiences at tearooms around the world.

As a bonus, every book ends with instructions on "How to Brew the Perfect Pot of Tea." Recipes mentioned are shared at the end. And should the reader be inspired to visit the locale featured, Melanie includes a "Resource Guide," listing restaurants and points of interest in the area.

What's the next tea adventure for Melanie O'Hara? First, the sixth book in *The Traveling Tea Ladies* series is scheduled for release in early 2015. She is also working with a Broadway actress to record audio versions of all her books.

Later, in 2015, her fans can expect the second book in her new *Savannah Skies* series, *Savannah Skies: Changing Tides*. The first, *Savannah Skies: Return to Tybee Island*, was released in 2013. She began these to challenge herself to write something more dramatic than the light-hearted tea ladies stories.

"I have had experience with heartbreak, and I felt the *Savannah Skies* series was a way I could encourage people. These books are based on family issues with the message that even though our families may not be perfect, being around family is not such a bad thing," she explains.

Despite the more serious story line, Melanie says her tea fans should not be disappointed. "There's an Irish family in the books, and they do drink tea all day long!"

Deborah Garrison Lowery is a freelance journalist living in Johnson City, Tennessee.