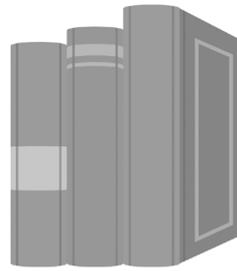


Books & Writers



Best selling author charms standing room only crowd at Gibbs Gardens Patti Callahan Henry's new novel weaves story of love and family struggles

By David R. Altman
Books & Writers Editor

Can you imagine trying to write a book that was inspired by an extremely personal event that happened to your brother or sister?

Best-selling author Patti Callahan Henry says her latest book was the toughest of the nine she has written. The novel, *And Then I Found You*, was published on April 9 and was inspired by a remarkable true-life story involving the author's sister Barbi.

The book details the decision by a young woman whose life-changing experience affected her life and those around her. It's an extraordinary story about how time, technology and some unpredictable choices create what appears to be a collision course among its key characters.

Without giving away the story itself, the book's subject is a young woman named Kate who, according to the publisher's description, "has a secret, something tucked away in her past." It's this secret that serves as the novel's main storyline, creating conflict and crisis for Kate and her family.

Henry, the *New York Times* best-selling author of *The Art of Keeping Secrets* and eight other books, spoke last week at a sun-drenched book signing at Gibbs Gardens. The author, who now lives in Birmingham, Al., but did most of her growing up in Atlanta, said she was excited to be back in north Georgia.

"This is the 10th city we've been to in the last 11 days, and the closest I've been to home," Henry said, adding that she was excited with the crowd nearly 200 that filled a huge tent at Gibbs Gardens.

The author appeared with her sister Barbi Callahan Burris whose life experiences led to the inspiration for Henry's book.

Burris spoke candidly, saying that the events over the past several years "...have changed my life, showing how God's hand was involved in all of this."

Henry, who has published in numerous magazines including *Southern Living* and *Good Housekeeping*, wore a white sleeveless dress befitting the 80 degree temperatures and high humidity. She was featured as part of the "Lunch & Lit" Series at Gibbs Gardens. The author and her sister entertained the audience with an informal talk about the genesis of the book, which has already met with critical praise. *The Huffington Post* called *And Then I Found You* "... a story with eloquence and beauty...her most personal and most powerful story to date."

When asked whether it was difficult to write fictional characters based on real people, Henry replied "Yes, absolutely, she said. "That's why I made some of



Author Patti Callahan Henry (l) and sister Barbi Callahan Burris talk about Henry's latest novel *And Then I Found You* at a Gibbs Gardens book signing on April 17. The book was inspired by events in Barbi's life.

these characters in book so opposite of the real people," she said with a smile. "I tried to use some emotional truths without using the actual personalities."

A crowd of nearly 200 attended the book signing, with many in the Gibbs Gardens crowd glowing with praise about Henry's work.

Retta Smith who lives in Bent Tree says she has read several of Henry's books. "I enjoy her books very much," said Smith. She says the books are full of different plots that keep you turning the page. Asked whether she had ever considered writing a book, Smith laughed and replied "...I think I have that great American novel in me, but it's mostly in my mind."

Henry's parents, Dr. George Callahan and his wife Bonnie, live in Tate. Her father, a long-time Irish minister, actually grabbed the microphone before turning it over to his daughters and joked "...we have been at many book signings and I have never been introduced!" With the crowd laughing, he told the gathering how proud he was of his daughter and encouraged her "to say something nice about me."

Henry actually wrote her first book at age 12. Although that memoir was never published, she knew she wanted to write even back then. While Henry's professional career took a different path as she earned a Master's degree in Child-Health, "writing is all I ever wanted to do." When she is not writing she's balancing a busy life as the mother of three kids.

In a dialogue that captures both the spirit of Southern her-



Bent Tree resident Retta Smith (l) is greeted by author Patti Callahan Henry after Henry's book-signing at Gibbs Gardens. Smith is a big fan of Henry's books.

itage and the complexities of modern life, Henry's richly told stories lead her readers along a wide range of emotions, often from heartache and guilt to family strife, and, ultimately, to resolution or acceptance. There is a stream of unflinching spirituality throughout her work that in a subtle way, gives not only credibility to the stories but strength to her central characters. Like all successful writers, her characters are rich in detail, allowing the reader an easy entry into their lives.

Henry's other books include, *Losing the Moon*, *Where the River Runs*, *When Light Breaks*, *Between the Tides*, *The Art of Keeping Secrets*, *Driftwood Summer*, *The Perfect Love Song* and *Coming up for Air*.

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