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Denver author brings history to life

Michelle T. Bernard Nov 27, 2017



Tricia Martineau Wagner in her home in Denver with her collection of props that she takes with her to do presentations based on her books.

Michelle T. Bernard

Irritated and stressed during a move from Chicago to California with her husband and two children, once she got on the plane, Tricia Martineau Wagner consoled herself by thinking about the relative ease of her relocation compared to how the early settlers made their way to the Golden State.

"...In that moment there clicked an interest and once we did get to California I started researching the Oregon Trail," Wagner, who now lives in Denver, said. "It took about a year to write it but when it was done I sent out a manuscript to about 30 different publishers. Soon the rejection letters started coming in."

The manuscript was for a children's book and, instead of a straight out rejection letter, one publisher wrote to tell Wagner that they weren't doing any children's books at the time and asked if she'd be willing to write an adult's book on the same topic.

"That wasn't exactly what I intended to do but I thought 'why not,'" she said. "Then I wrote 'It Happened on the Oregon Trail,' which is really for a crossover audience for adults and children as young as fifth grade."

When that book was done, the same publisher asked what else she'd like to write about and she said she was interested in African American women of the old west. Her third book was about slavery in the south and her fourth was focused on black cowboys of the old west. All are nonfiction and contain short stories.

"Then I decided that I always wanted to do that children's book so I wanted to get going and I've had two that just came out," she said.

The two children's books are "50 Wacky Things Animals Do" and "North Carolina the First Golden State."

Wagner, who was a teacher for 12 years, also does interactive presentations based on her books. For each book, she has props and period costumes that she dresses in. For example, for presentations about her "North Carolina the First Golden State," Wagner comes dressed in a gold miner's costume and gives a history of America's two big gold rushes, the first occurring in North Carolina. She brings with her gold mining artifacts and demonstrates how to pan for gold. She reads excerpts from her book, inspires the children to read and write and offers a question and answer session. She also brings with her an autographed copy of the book to be gifted to the school library.

"It's like a living history museum coming to the school," she said. "It's very hands on, the kids love it and I love it. I think it's so important for a kid to have a book in their hands rather than being on a computer all the time. When they open a book they go into a whole new world. It's an escape for both adults and kids."

Wagner is currently working on additional children's books. She can be reached via her website at www.authortalk.org.