



Author Carolyn Woolston began playing the folk harp 12 years ago.

SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

CAROLYN WOOLSTON

Authors 2000 Felton resident a master of the romance fiction genre 2-13-12

by ANN PARKER
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Don't mention the term "bodice ripper" to Carolyn Woolston.

"If anyone says that to me I just go up in smoke," declares the Felton resident. "There's still that onus of, 'Oh, that,' about the romance fiction genre."

Woolston has authored 18 historical romance novels, most published by Harlequin, with two more on the way. Her meticulously researched books are set primarily in the Old West of northern Oregon, where her family originated; two have medieval settings. She writes as Lynna Banning, a blend of her childhood nickname and her mother's maiden name. [When she began working with Harlequin, writers were required to use a pseudonym.]

Her latest novel, "Gauchos & Gumption: My Argentine Honey-moon," was released this month by Turquoise Morning Press. It's based on the true story of Carolyn's maternal grandmother, who at 18 followed her new husband to Argentina on an ill-advised ranching venture. Written as a fictionalized journal covering 1910-1913, the book includes photos the young bride took with her Kodak box camera.

"They suffered and starved and struggled," says Woolston, whose mother was born in Buenos Aires right after a 1,000-mile

cattle drive. "My grandfather loved it. My grandmother hated it — I think that's why she chose to tell me her stories."

A former Santa Cruz High English teacher, Woolston also worked as an editor at Stanford Research Institute. She was a well-paid but bored editor at Santa Cruz's Lockheed facility in 1995 when she wrote her first novel, a medieval romance set in Spain. Harlequin rejected that manuscript but published her next effort, "Western Rose," and many more.

"Harlequin has been very good to me — at one point they bought a book a year, bang, bang, bang, with no revisions," she comments. "I kind of stumbled into writing from editing: it was much harder than I dreamed."

Woolston writes about 1,000 words a day, or five typed pages; three rooms in her home are lined with books used to research storylines. Her novels are sold all over the world, from England to India, and have been translated into Hebrew and Korean.

An accomplished musician, Carolyn plays piano, harpsichord, folk harp, psaltery and recorder. She has performed with a five-person medieval ensemble, Early Muse, for 20 years.

"I choose my talents and stick to them: writing and music," she says. "And I don't write hot, I write warm: I write love stories."

GETTING TO KNOW CAROLYN WOOLSTON

BORN: Oct. 14, 1937, in Oregon City, Ore.

AS A CHILD: "I wanted to be a nurse and wear a starched uniform. I was very shy, very skinny, very competitive. I didn't have many social graces and was smart but didn't know it."

HER BEGINNINGS AS A WRITER: "I wrote little poems in childhood and high school, but never fiction."

THE LOVE OF HER LIFE: She was married for 24 years to Clarence Woolston, who died in 1999. The two met at Lockheed, where he was photographing explosives testing; he was also a jazz musician and woodworker.

COMING TO CALIFORNIA: In 1946 her family moved from Oregon to Watsonville, where her father taught high school English and her mother worked at Mode o' Day dress store.

WHERE SHE WORKS: "I write in restaurants, in airports, in campgrounds — at Christmas I had a cold and wrote 132 pages lying on my couch. When my husband was ill I wrote in his hospital room."

IF SHE COULD MEET ANY AUTHOR, LIVING OR DEAD: "I think I'd like to talk to Chaucer. He has such a sharp eye, such an incisive way of presenting words, such a compassionate feel for human foibles."

FAVORITE AUTHORS: Jane Austen, Annie Proulx, Kent Hauf, John Steinbeck, Tamin Ansary, Timothy Egan

RECOGNITIONS: Winner of Hold Medallion award, finalist in Romance Writers of America and Women Writers of the West competitions

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