

At 75, Baltimore author publishes first book

By Laura Sturza

After 20 years as a journalist, Patricia Vido was convinced she couldn't write fiction, but at 75, the Baltimore author launched her debut novel in February.

For *Love of Billie*, Vido's adult coming-of-age novel, is "the story of a father-son love triangle and the power and pull of first love," she said.

From the mid-1970s until the mid-1990s, Vido wrote for the Pittsburgh region's *Valley News Dispatch*, covering news and later serving as a features editor.

In 2004, she moved to the Baltimore area and applied her writing skills to public relations and fundraising for nonprofit organizations, including Girl Scouts of Central Maryland and Community Health Charities of Maryland.

While she wanted to try writing fiction, she was concerned because she was accustomed to writing succinctly.

"Newspapers tell a story in one graph: who, what, when, where, why. It was daunting to think about writing 300 pages," Vido said.

'Sit down and write'

When she retired and had the time to devote to writing, she decided to stretch herself.

Vido read how-to books about writing, joined writing critique groups, ordered videos from The Great Courses program, and took classes at Baltimore County Community College. She describes these years of study as a kind of personal MFA program, covering topics such as outlining a novel, character development and self-publishing.

For those interested in writing their own

book, she recommends these forms of immersion, but the essential step, she said, is to get words on the page.

"At some point, they just have to sit down and write," she said.

Writing to keep sharp

Vido isn't alone in realizing her writing dreams after age 60. Amelia Hill's 2023 article in *The Guardian* reports that the literary world is moving away from an obsession with youth. Hill cites experts who say that "older, unpublished writers are now at a premium — with radical, edgy women aged into their 80s particularly sought-after."

Like many older adults, Vido has experienced mild cognitive decline, but working on her book has kept her mentally sharp.

"I still go into the pantry and can't remember what I went to get, but I remember everything that's in my book," she said.

"The characters are like real people to me; they continue to live in my head. The fact that I can encompass all this in my mind really shows me that I am still cognitively there."

Book about growing up

Initially, Vido thought she would write about a workplace love affair, but as the characters unfolded, she discovered a different throughline.

In *For Love of Billie*, 12-year-old Finn is smitten with his father's beautiful 25-year-old female coworker, Billie. The son enters a rivalry with the father he idolizes. (Billie is merely nice to the boy; nothing develops beyond Finn's innocent infatuation.)

The story follows Finn through high

school and college, where he has his first actual romances with age-appropriate girls.

The book explores tragedy, dramatic family dynamics and the contrast between infatuation and love. While it is a young man's coming-of-age story, it was written with women in mind.

"Though the main character is male, there are strong women in it," Vido said.

She was drawn to telling Finn's story after creating a character who is introspective, sensitive and prone to magical thinking.

"I saw him as being in touch with his feminine side," she said.

Foremost, the book is a story of Finn's journey to adulthood.

"I'm 75, and I just love coming-of-age stories," Vido said, adding that it will appeal to people of all ages because the theme of growing up is timeless.

"It can remind us that we are the main characters of our lives, and we're all trying to figure out who we are and who we want to be."

Upon receiving the first copy, Vido said she was "positively giddy. I've been beaming since I got it done ... and as I read through it, I'm very proud of it."

The entire process has left her grateful for all the help she has received. Vido appreciates how teachers, her editor and fellow writers helped her realize this dream,



Patricia Vido fulfilled her lifelong dream of writing a novel. Her debut work was published on Valentine's Day.

noting that she learned from other participants in classes and workshops. Their encouragement was essential to her success.

Sequel in the works

Vido is already planning a sequel novel: *Finn at Forty*, in which readers would learn how he's doing in midlife.

For Love of Billie launched on February 14. The book is available on Bookshop.org, Amazon and on Vido's website, patriciavido.com.

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Mar. 26

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Visit the Hal Gomer Gallery at Chesapeake Arts Center through April 7 to experience the fifth annual exhibition celebrating

Women's History Month. This year's theme, *HER Maryland: Stories that Inspire*, showcases the stories of Maryland icons through art and history. An opening reception with complimentary drinks and snacks takes place on Thu., March 26 from 6 to 8 p.m. Chesapeake Arts Center is located at 194 Hammonds Ln., Brooklyn Park. For more information and to RSVP, visit bit.ly/HERMaryland or call (410) 636-6597.



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