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Former Valley News Dispatch reporter returns to her roots in new contemporary, romantic fiction



By Ember Duke

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When former Valley News Dispatch reporter and editor Patricia Vido started writing her debut novel “For Love of Billie” 10 years ago, she was sure of one detail: its setting in the Alle-Kiski Valley.

“That’s the most important piece of a story,” Vido said. “The Alle-Kiski Valley is where I completed my own coming of age.”

The novel follows protagonist Finn’s infatuation from ages 12 to 19 with his father’s girlfriend, Billie, described in the book’s opening chapter as a woman with “copper-colored hair like a halo.”

It delves into Finn’s emotional development as he goes through puberty and romantic relationships with girls he compares to Billie, Vido said.



Pat Vido, an Alle-Kiski Valley native and former Valley News Dispatch reporter and editor, released her first novel, "For Love of Billie." (Courtesy of Pat Vido)

"I envisioned (Finn) possibly writing the story in a journal," Vido said of the novel's narrative voice. "Yet he would recall how he felt at the time of being 12."

A four-star IndieReader review writes: "Vido delivers a tender, psychologically perceptive novel about first love, emotional fixation and the way childhood experiences can quietly shape an entire adult life."

The novel is set in Danton, a fictional Southwestern Pennsylvania town that has some familiar attractions, such as Freeport Community Park. Its events also reminisce on moments, such as a huge storm and a child's disappearance, that Vido recalled covering as a young reporter.

Debra Duncan, a former Valley News Dispatch colleague, said time in the newsroom probably helped Vido develop her characters.

"Pat's always been a good writer ... a good listener," Duncan said.

Duncan, who read the novel's first draft three years ago, said she's looking forward to reading the published version.

"It's an interesting question — a 12-year-old boy who's infatuated with a lover of his father," she said. "What that would mean for both the father and the son."

Vido released the book through Maryland-based Grunge Muffin Press, which operates using an independent hybrid publishing model, according to its website. “For Love of Billie” was the publisher’s debut novel.

Grunge Muffin founder Meredith S.K. Boas said she chose to publish Vido’s novel for its “clear, confident voice” and “emotional precision.”

“Pat is incredibly thoughtful about her craft,” Boas said. “She’s reflective, intentional. ... She cares deeply about getting the emotional tone.”

Vido said she has already started on a sequel, “Finn at 40,” which she joked might take her another 10 years to write.

The first two chapters of “For Love of Billie” are available for free download on the Grunge Muffin Press website.

It is also available in Oakmont’s Mystery Lovers Bookshop in Oakmont, where Vido will host an author signing from 1 to 2 p.m. on Wednesday, March 11.

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