

Tallahassee.com

Family figurine inspires local writer's 'Glass Madonna'

By Claire Hamner Maturro • SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT • Published: December 12, 2010 2:00AM

When Donna Meredith inherited a glass Madonna figurine from a family member and didn't know the story behind it, she made one up. This was not a big reach for a woman who as a child wrote her own mystery stories and who grew up in a region famous for its glass industry. Today, "The Glass Madonna" is an award-winning first novel for this Tallahassee writer.

It was not just her heirloom Madonna, but her own family's role in glassmaking that inspired Meredith to set her novel against the backdrop of that industry. Her great grandfather helped to establish the Pittsburgh Plate Glass factory in Clarksburg, W. V., and, like the protagonist in the novel, Meredith had an uncle in the industry.

Meredith painstakingly researched the glass industry, interviewing former glass workers and spending a day with Lesley Nolan, a noted Tallahassee glass artist.

Meredith's research also took her to the Clarksburg-Harrison County Library in West Virginia, where she uncovered information on the influence of glass workers in the 1912 political races in that region. Glassmaking is one back story in the novel, but the protagonist's escape from an abusive marriage is a driving force in the plot.

"I think those who lived through the gains made for women in the 1970s will enjoy the story," Meredith said. "But I hope younger women fortunate enough to take the progress achieved by the women's movement for granted will also read the novel. It's easy to forget how many jobs weren't readily available for women, how difficult it was to divorce before no-fault laws were enacted, how birth control freed women from constant pregnancy, and how much our culture has changed in its attitude toward unmarried mothers and their children."

Prior to writing fiction, Meredith's career path nurtured her love for writing. As a freelance writer, she has had articles published in *Tallahassee* magazine, *Southern Literary Review*, the *Tallahassee Democrat* and the *Midwest Review*. She also taught

English, journalism and TV production in public high schools in West Virginia and Georgia. She is the current president of the Tallahassee Writers Association and writes a column for the *Democrat's* Chronicles edition.

While "The Glass Madonna" focuses on women's issues, Meredith's second manuscript focuses on race and education and is already garnering attention. "What's Cooking in the Faculty Lounge" won a first place award for unpublished women's fiction from the Florida Writers Association in October. Meredith hopes to see it published soon.

The manuscript she is writing now is a thriller constructed around water issues in Florida.

"The Glass Madonna" is being considered as a 2011 selection by several book clubs.

"It's a good book club book selection because there are so many issues to discuss," Meredith said.

For more information about the author, visit www.donnameredith.com.

- Claire Hamner Maturro is the author of four legal mysteries set in Florida, including "Bone Valley" and "Sweetheart Deal." She was a visiting professor of legal writing at The

University of Oregon School of Law in 2007. **TITLE**

- "The Glass Madonna," by Donna Meredith (Wild Women Writers, \$15); available at My Favorite Books and The Art of the Find, and at www.amazon.com and www.barnesandnoble.com.

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