

## eBook Author Interview: Ruth Marlene Friesen, *Ruthe's Secret Roses*

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**DIANE:** You worked on your first novel, *Ruthe's Secret Roses* [www.booklocker.com/books/642.html](http://www.booklocker.com/books/642.html) for 30 years, starting with an old Underwood typewriter and finishing with a new Pentium III computer. This is the story of a Mennonite girl on the Saskatchewan prairie in Canada who commutes to work in the city, where she has "a special mission to be intentional in her friendship, and to share her secret of how to have intimacy with God." The conflict that arises comes from Ruthe keeping her city friends a secret from her family. You were born into an evangelical Mennonite family living on this same prairie, and have been active in the church and children's ministries throughout your life. Would you share with us some of the history behind the writing of this novel? How much of who you are has been written into the character of Ruthe?

**RUTH:** Quite a lot! The first plot came from gazing at a postcard of the Rocky mountains when I was about 12. It involved a young girl coming out of an obscure life up the mountain side to work in the resort. Her very character began to influence people and made for the adventures. As I grew older I brought the setting closer to home, by placing it in Saskatoon, our nearest city. I looked forward to leaving our small town after graduation and working there, so I began to put my fantasies into the story.

However, I was also reading a lot of books from the library on writing, and trying to follow every suggestion. That was my learning to write phase. When I finally thought the book was ready I sent it to publishers, only to get rejections and to be ignored.

I'd let the book rest a few months, and then by January 1 I was ready to look it over and see where it could be improved. Usually things would jump out at me, and I'd throw myself into a rigorous writing schedule -- but in secret, because I thought my family and friends would somehow convince me I couldn't pull it off.

These annual cycles went on for 4 years in Saskatoon, and then when I moved to London, Ontario (Canada), another 12 years. Then I went home to care for my parents, and decided to hide the manuscript in a deacon's bench with a deep drawer, and not take it out until I just had to write again. I honestly thought it couldn't be improved any more.

For eight years I didn't touch it. But as I'd be washing floors for instance, I'd suddenly get vivid visions of how that book ought to be written if I were to enjoy it myself. Gradually I realized that I could dump all those formulas other writers used, and write the perfect book I would love to read.

It took eight years to actually work on it again because Mom got sicker and was dying, my Underwood couldn't type a straight line, and I had to pray for a year for funds to get a computer, and then I had to honor a promised translation job! Like Mom, I persevered against all odds.

Once I could write the book over again, I freely gave Ruthe, the main character, my personality, interests, and attitudes. The only difference is that she got to have the experiences I had fantasized about as a teen and young woman.

**DIANE:** *Ruthe's Secret Roses* is described as Christian fiction. I've read that Christian readers want such things as renewal of faith, action without sex and profanity, or simply something they will feel

safe in reading. What are you trying to provide to your target audience? Do you view your novel as a tool for ministry, or are you just telling a good story?

**RUTH:** I like all those things myself. We readers vicariously become what we read, and learn a lot from fiction, but I'd noticed that many Christian novels were on the shallow side. There wasn't a lot on the nitty-gritty part of living out our faith. I remember how I longed for someone to teach me to pray effectively when I was a teen, and how to discern the whispers of God in a crisis; what to do next. So my target audience are those lonely people, mostly girls and women, who also crave an intimate friend to show them by example, and to fulfill them in their spirits.

You know, years ago I tried to get into street ministry, but I quickly discovered that I didn't have much to offer them because I'd never been a street person, on drugs or in an ugly lifestyle. Then I discovered that I do have something valuable to say -- to the lonely, the spiritually starved people who wish God would answer them. I can also identify with responsible oldest sisters who end up raising their siblings, and with those who have creative energies that need outlets.

Yes, I trust Ruthe's story is a good story, but I confess to loading it with comfort and counsel to those who can find and accept it.

**DIANE:** You have a page on your web site for Frequently Asked Questions about your novel. While some of the questions are about you as the writer, there are answers to such questions as "What is the main conflict or theme in this story?" and "What are the secret roses in the title?" Given the popularity of reading groups, have you ever considered offering a reading group guide for your novel? What do you think about this idea as a marketing strategy for ebooks?

**RUTH:** Tell me more! I haven't seen this done yet, and I've spent the last four years online teaching myself how to be a business woman marketing my book. That sounds great.

I have expected that as my novel grows in popularity, I'll be able to go into schools and have fun analyzing all the sub-plots and imagery in the book with students. (I discovered some myself after it was done).

The main comment I hear from readers now is that they are surprised at how many people are in the book. I just shrug and tell them, "But I'm a people-person; what else could you expect?" To counteract and help them get acquainted with the novel's characters, I'm planning an interactive game on my web site with drawings of the characters, and clues that show only when you put your mouse over them.

**DIANE:** Tell us about the one-of-a-kind children's books that you create and give as gifts. How did you get started doing this?

**RUTH:** This is where my playful imagination has so much fun. After my niece Jalise was born I sat at my reception desk and visualized having her on my lap and having a conversation with her about kisses. (I was projecting for when she'd be about two.) I picked up some water color markers and sketched gauzy donuts and stars, and cinnamon hearts flying between us. Suddenly I knew what to do. I added some lines of text to each page, and made a booklet. To keep her from chewing this booklet up too soon, I had the pages laminated and then sewed them together down the middle. I called it *A Whimsical Textbook on Kisses*.

Jalise is now going on 22, and has a one-year-old son of her own, but she still loves that book and

wants to know when I'm going to get it published. Others have said the same thing, but I haven't had time to pursue a publisher willing to take on an unknown, and picture-books are a little expensive for self-publishing.

I did one for her brother Jasel too, who always loved to help me with washing dishes when they came to visit. That one is in an odd poem format where he goes around asking Auntie Ruth, Grandma, and Great-grandma about how they did dishes, going back to when pioneers had to rub dishes with sand and wash them in a brook. "*The Song the Dishwasher Sings*" has full-page charcoal sketches, and is laminated too, with a home-made hardcover.

Another one I did was for an elderly friend in her 80s, who had many friends, and had for years babysat almost all the kids of our town, but as her memory slipped, she kept complaining that she had no friends. Margaret had often told me stories of how she had polio at age 2, and her siblings had pushed her to school and around the village in a wicker carriage and included her in everything. So I did up a picture book for her of her own life story, proving that "*Yes, Margaret, You have Friends!*"

Meantime, Jalise has just asked for a Hobbs book for her son Calvin, who is named after that cartoon character. I've got an idea for the book but haven't started it yet.

DIANE: I read that there will be a sequel to *Ruthe's Secret Roses*. Where will the sequel take Ruthe, and us, and when can we look forward to reading it? Do you have any other writing projects planned?

**RUTH:** [Giggle]. Oh yes! I have ideas for books almost the way some people drop dandruff. I really don't think I can write them all in my lifetime. But I decided a few years ago that starting a new book every time I have an idea buzz by my nose means I'd get none done. I resolved to make *Ruthe's Secret Roses* my main thrust until it began to sell itself almost, or at least I could afford to leave that in others' hands.

In my head, and in my older computer downstairs, are notes and outlines for several sequels to this novel. In the next one, *Dew on the Roses*, Ruthe finally has the romance of my dreams, but she will also have serious health problems and grapple with whether or not she may pray for and expect a complete healing. Instead of a whole book leading up to marriage, it will start with marriage, and go with them on their honeymoon, and as they settle at home, and learn to know and love and work together. People will accuse me of being too idealist (not for the first time!), but that's okay. I'm sick and tired of broken marriages and dysfunctional families. I bet other readers would love to live with a happily married couple for a while too, and watch how they solve problems creatively.

The one after that will be called something like, "*A Great Big Wonderful Family*," and will have an adventure in each chapter as this ideal couple vows to adopt and take in anyone who comes to their mansion and wants to be part of their family. Some of those characters have already made themselves so alive and interesting in my imagination that they'll call for spin-off books of their own! [Big Grin! Don't you wish you were me? I get to read all these fun books in my mind, and you can't get a peek yet.]

It's just that I have an agenda of goals or stages to pass through first.

I'm also trying to sneak in little blocks of time to update and re-publish my family history and genealogy books. I'm converting them to e-book format for easier sales at much less expense. Teaching myself HTML and getting an e-book compiler means there's nothing to stop me from churning out

books of all types, both fiction and non-fiction. This year I plan to turn the following on my computer into e-books, and set some up for sale, and some perhaps as free gifts to attract new friends:

- Spiritual Warfare (Bible study of Joshua)
- Speak, Lord (Bible study of Luke)
- Journal of God's Provision (out of my online journal, 1999-2000)
- A Godly Inheritance (family history publ. 1988)
- A Network of Neudorfs
- Our Friesens & Assorted Friesens

I also have the following plans for gift books:

- write Hobb's book for (gr.nephew) Calvin
- finish book on Uncle John, our Black Sheep
- compile Mom's & Grandma's recipes into cookbooks.

Oh, and I also write an original short Christmas story every year and that small booklet is my card and gift to my friends. Some friends send me cards just to be sure they don't get dropped from my list. (It was 100 paper, and about 80-100+ as an ebook in 2002).

Tired yet? [grin] You probably are, and I'm just gettin' revved up! But I'll stop there so as not to overwhelm you.

Blessings & Thanks,  
Ruth

Sincere thanks to the Publisher of Mind Like Water, Inc., <https://www.mindlikewater.com> for permission to reprint the interview here. However, that website does not exist any more. (2022). The phrase is used by many, but the site itself has disappeared. So now I'm extra glad that I saved this interview, because I'd forgotten that I'd shared so many of my ideas at that time.