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## Doyle's Alaskan experiences result in The Fisherman's Quilt

By Vanessa Orr

When Margaret Doyle first moved with her husband to Kodiak, Alaska, she thought that life would be a fairy tale. She believed that her husband would go out to fish in the day and come home at night, and they would live a cozy, comfortable life.

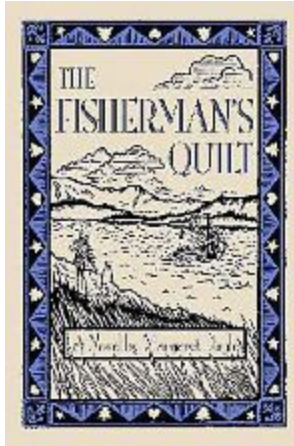
"I had no idea how lonely it would be waiting for an ambitious husband who was out fishing nine to ten months of the year," she said. "And I wasn't prepared for the whole atmosphere of Kodiak; it is such a daunting place. I took it for granted that I would make friends, not realizing that sometimes you don't automatically bond with the people that you meet."

Doyle's book, *The Fisherman's Quilt*, is based on her experiences living on the island and trying to regain some sense of control over her life. Called 'reality literature' by one reviewer, the book follows the story of a young mother as she tries to raise three children and to keep her family together even as fishing continues to pull her husband away.

"It's about finding your place in a community, even when you're floundering," said Doyle, who lived in Alaska for seven years. "It's about a woman who has to find the courage to do whatever the situation demands, and about the reality of keeping your wits about you when you are pretty much by yourself."



Margaret Doyle based her novel, *The Fisherman's Quilt*, on her experience living in Kodiak, Alaska.



Doyle, who now lives in Orcas Island, Washington, was born in Seattle and raised in the Pacific Northwest. She married a commercial fisherman in 1975, and they decided to move to Alaska so that he could fish year-round. "I kept a diary in Kodiak, which I later decided to turn into a memoir," said Doyle of how the book got its start. "The experiences that I wrote about aren't glossed over or romanticized; as one reviewer put it, 'this is no sugar-tale romance.'"

Doyle, who wrote for the Kodiak Daily Mirror while on the island, said that she did have some qualms about writing such an honest, sometimes harsh, book about her experiences. "There's an expression that writing a novel is like pulling your pants down in public," she said. "In this book, I'm pulling other people's pants down too. But I didn't want to write something that was kind of real and also not real. Bad and shocking things happen, and that was part of life in Kodiak."

"Nora and Matt Hunter, the main characters, are not role models," she added. "They are struggling with life the way that most of us are struggling."

It is this universality that allows readers to appreciate the book, even if they are unfamiliar with what life can be like on the Last Frontier. "I think that there are a lot of women out there that, in the process of maturing, realize that weddings and marriages are overly romanticized," said Doyle. "A lot of women, especially Baby Boomers, have shared some of Nora's experiences. And they've learned that they have to find it within themselves to make their own happiness."

Reviewer Ann Conroy of the Columbia City Book Club agreed. "The Fisherman's Quilt is The Perfect Storm in a doublewide trailer," she wrote. "As soon as I started reading it, I was along for the ride, up to Alaska and into Nora Hunter's life, rooting for her all the way."

Doyle found her own happiness by moving back to Seattle, where she raised her children and wrote *The Fisherman's Quilt*. Her former husband stayed in Alaska, and in 2001, Doyle married cabinetmaker Dan Stevens and moved to Orcas Island.

"Right now, I have a couple of things in the works, including a memoir about growing up in a Catholic neighborhood in Seattle in the 1950s and '60s," she said. "It's a story about how lives can be wild and innocent at the same time, and about how magical and mystical the church can be to a young girl who doesn't always understand the rules, but knows that she is supposed to live by them. It was a very different world back then."

Doyle also works with a real estate company, and spends time in community activities including singing with a community chorus that has performed at Carnegie Hall. She also performs with an acappella group that travels to Europe every three years.

As for traveling back to Alaska, Doyle doesn't see herself leaving Orcas Island anytime soon. "There was a time about five years ago when one of my children was at college on the East Coast and one was in the Marines, serving in the Middle East," she explained. "I decided then that if I ever got them back here, I wasn't going to be the one to go away. I love the Pacific Northwest, and though I might go to Alaska for a long visit, this is now my home."

For more information on The Fisherman's Quilt, visit [www.FishermansQuilt.com](http://www.FishermansQuilt.com).