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Living Section: THE TICKET p. 7



Courtesy photo "The Darkness Before Dawn," a novel by Alice Cangemi is selling on Amazon. It is the first in a trilogy by Cangemi, a mathematics instructor at Lone Star College-Montgomery, and a resident of Grangerland.

Alice Cangemi, a resident of Grangerland, never considered becoming a writer until she had a midnight epiphany last year. Now, although new to the craft, she already has completed a trilogy dealing with child sexual abuse and the lasting aftermath it creates.

The first of the three, titled "The Darkness before Dawn," is already published. Cangemi is in process of arranging a book signing at the Conroe Hastings, and works with Darkness to Light (D2L), a charity that promotes the prevention of childhood sexual abuse through education.

"This actually is a coming-of-age love story," Cangemi said, "a story that all mothers and future mothers should read. It leads to understanding why a child will not tell you about continuing sexual abuse, and what you can do to prevent it from happening to your child."

The leading character in "The Darkness before Dawn" is a trusting little girl who is assaulted at age six. As the story unfolds

the girl, Dawn, navigates to young womanhood and meets a boy, Jerrod, who comes to adore her over time. But her innocence was stolen, her spirit broken, and her soul damaged, all underscored through flashback memories of her trauma.

Although Jerrod falls in love with Dawn, he unknowingly must deal with the dark, painful memories that trigger her pain. At center of the story is whether Dawn can ever come to reveal her dark secret to Jerrod. She will either become a victim of that blackness or muster strength to overcome it. And what will be Jerrod's reaction if he learns the secret that's eating her soul?

Subsequent volumes in this trilogy are titled "The Break of Dawn: Facing the Darkness" and "The Light of Dawn: A New Day."

Cangemi is a native Houstonian who moved to Grangerland at age nine, where she now lives on five wooded acres. She graduated with honors from Conroe High School in 1985, with the goal of becoming a math teacher. Although English was her favorite subject, she decided on math because more scholarships were available to girls in that subject. So she went to Sam Houston State University and took her bachelor's degree in mathematics and secondary education, with an English minor.

While in college she worked as a legal secretary and a police dispatcher. She could have gone to work at NASA but declined because she wanted to become a teacher.

Cangemi taught at Knox Junior High School, and then at Conroe High for seven years, aiming for advancement. She did not want to become a principal or counselor so she set her goal on college professorship, and earned a master's in math.

When Montgomery College opened in 1995, Cangemi became a mathematics teacher there, and continues at Lone Star College-Montgomery, teaching all levels from developmental through calculus. An expert in her field, she often is called upon to lead workshops about motivation and using math manipulatives to teach concepts.

"I never intended to write novels about this kind of abuse," she said. "It just came to me in the middle of the night at age 45. I woke up and needed to do it, maybe because the 40th anniversary of my own experience was coming up."

The next morning she wrote a brief outline of all three books and became permanently attached to a spiral notebook for saving notes.

In the meantime, writing has been good for her health. "I now swim, walk five miles a day, have lost 65 pounds, and eat healthfully. I stopped watching TV (except football that she dearly loves), and am extremely close to my family who lives nearby, and am proud of my stepdaughter who is an English teacher."

At almost six feet tall, Cangemi easily relates to towering over others, and is as comfortable with this as she is with most everything else.

"My biggest fear is not failure," Alice said. "It is the regret of not trying. Attempting something is never a failure." And there's a lot of wisdom in those words.
By Peggie Miller