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Kelly: Why an East Coast couple, an oceanographer and a psychologist, now live in Omaha

By Michael Kelly / World-Herald columnist Jul 22, 2017 Updated Jul 22, 2017

Michael Kelly



Meredith Fuller, who by “happy startled choice” found herself in Omaha, has used her retirement to complete a novel.

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An oceanographer and his psychologist wife moved about as far away as you can get from an ocean in America — to Omaha.

“After two days here, we both knew we loved it,” said Meredith Ann Fuller. “We were each so relieved the other agreed.”

She and husband James Luyten, former director of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in Massachusetts, arrived in 2013. They had come for a year, they thought, to help their son and his family.

Dr. Elijah Luyten had survived brain cancer but no longer was practicing medicine. His wife, Trang, was working on her Ph.D. in pharmacy at Creighton University.

After she earned that degree, the couple and their three children moved on, and now live in California. But Meredith and Jim thought Omaha suited them just fine.

So what led an accomplished East Coast couple with a progressive outlook to settle in a politically conservative state in the middle of the country?

“Omaha punches above its weight in areas that are very enjoyable to us,” Meredith said. “The arts, theater, film — we love the Film Streams cinema.

“And the food scene. Jim and I love good local food, and we go to the Aksarben farmers market religiously. We love to cook with friends.

“There’s a sense of connection with the fabulous agricultural country, and Omaha probably has more interesting restaurants per capita — that also are more affordable — than Boston or New York.”

The couple also appreciates “the big skies,” she said, above Omaha and the rest of the state. They have driven through the Sand Hills and visited the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge in Valentine.

Jim and Meredith live in an urban condo at Midtown Crossing just west of downtown, where they enjoy mingling with the Turner Park throngs attending Jazz on the Green.

They like older neighborhoods, and always take visiting relatives and friends to north and South Omaha and various art centers.

Jim doesn't miss the ocean, she said, and has thrown himself into the local ceramics community, where he thinks of himself merely as "Jim the potter."

He is retired, and Meredith is mostly retired, still seeing a few Boston-area clients on Skype. And she is writing, having completed a novel, "Quarry," published by Colorado-based Mountain Water Press.

It's a three-generation story of immigrants to America — a girl of Finnish and Irish descent loses her father under traumatic circumstances and sets out to learn what happened to him.

The book is an "illustrated novel," with 40 drawings, photographs and paintings by Boulder, Colorado, artist Joan Anderson.

Meredith will sign copies at 1 p.m. Sunday at The Bookworm, north of 90th Street and West Center Road. Part of the proceeds go to the nonprofit Justice for Our Neighbors, which assists immigrants.

On her website, meredithannfuller.com, she writes: "My heart is a migrant. Perforce I moved to Nebraska. By happy startled choice I live where the kindness of strangers is usually genuine. ... I left the ocean and a big city for a home in Omaha, my lunge line tethered to a big sky."

Retired Omaha police officer to talk about book at Durham

Retired Omaha police officer Mark Langan will speak at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday at the Durham Museum about his book, "Busting Bad Guys."

I wrote about it when it was published in 2014. Since then, he has spoken about the book in Seattle, Boston, Minneapolis, Montreal, Phoenix and Baltimore, and won a medal for crime book of the year in the Independent Publisher Book Awards.

Now vice president of field operations for the Nebraska Humane Society, Mark spent 26 years on the police force, including infiltrating high-level narcotics operations.

He will appear in conjunction with the museum's tribute to the Omaha Police Department.

Vols were most talented in '97, when Huskers beat them

As football season approaches, Husker fans will look back fondly on the 20th anniversary of Nebraska's last national championship.

That convincing 42-17 Orange Bowl victory over Peyton Manning-led Tennessee that won the coaches' No. 1 final ranking has looked even better over the years.

The Knoxville News-Sentinel said this month that the Volunteers' 1997 team is still Tennessee's most talented. Seventeen of UT's 22 starters that year made NFL rosters, as did several who weren't starters in '97.

"Tennessee has had more successful teams," wrote columnist John Adams, "but it never had one with more talent."

Nebraska ranked 5th best state for starting a business

Speaking of high rankings:

[Wallethub.com](#) ranks Nebraska seventh among the least expensive states for residential energy spending, and the fifth best state in which to start a new business.

Des Moines aims tourism marketing at cities like Omaha

Des Moines tourism officials are rolling out a new marketing campaign hoping to give places like Omaha "a serious case of FOMO."

That's a Fear of Missing Out, touting the Iowa capital's food, bike trails, nightlife and more.

A tourism official told the Des Moines Register that 10 to 20 years ago, Des Moines wouldn't have advertised in places like Kansas City "or even Omaha," but "now we have things that we think are as cool or even cooler than those communities."

But in commercials aimed at other cities, the Register article observed, "Tourism officials wanted to show Des Moines is cool without saying it outright. There are, after all, few things less cool than saying how cool you are."

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