BOWLING GREEN DAILY NEWS

Veteran writer's new 'Whirlwinds' book offers spiritual journey

Posted: Sunday, June 7, 2026

"Whirlwinds: Past and Present" by Noel Barton. La Vergne, TN: IngramSpark, 2026, 256 pages, $22.00 (paperback).



"The sensation of being suspended in midair as though my weightless body could soar into the heavens made me feel enraptured but confused," Noel Barton explains at the beginning of "Whirlwinds: Past and Present," the latest installment in her popular "Whirlwinds" series. "Is this my final whirlwind? If so, why the delay? Was God trying to decide whether to take me or not? The two nurses, one on each side of my hospital bed, repeatedly asked if I could hear them. I heard them fine – just could not respond. Could they see my ethereal body floating above the bed? Likely not. If that were the case, they would be running frantically for the door instead of trying to rouse me."

"How comical," Barton continues. "Had I been able to laugh, the thought of them climbing over one another and bolting from the room would have made me roll. At least my sense of humor was alive and well – whether I was or not. A code blue began blasting over the intercom. The nurses dropped my hands that were now tender to the touch from their constant patting and scrambled down the hall toward the distress call. My ghostly essence fell to the bed and rejoined my physical body once they were gone. Guess the death angel had the wrong room."

If you are familiar with the author's ever-expanding body of exceptional storytelling, you are going to absolutely love "Whirlwinds: Past and Present." It's classic Barton, only better. If you are new to her literary contributions, you are in for a real treat. After only a few pages of her current triumph, you will be immediately mesmerized by her deeply introspective and innately relatable prose. An immensely gifted writer with a seemingly effortless ability to bring characters to life in a way few novelists and biographers can match, you will be astounded by the way she makes you feel like you have known the people in her narrative your entire life. You might even come to think of some of them as members of your own family. I know I did.

And as always, Barton weaves fundamental truths into prose that is inherently refreshing given everything that's going on in the world today.

Barton's previous books include "Watch for the Whirlwinds," (2015), "Meryl Jean Another Whirlwind," (2019), and "Lucretia," (2022). By-the-way, "Lucretia" is centered around a character who featured prominently in her first two books. A long-time resident of Bowling Green, Barton grew up in the Bootheel of Missouri. A mother, grandmother, widowed (twice), retired travel

counselor, and best friend to her little dog Zacchaeus, the author is a devout Christian who credits God for her writing ability. Ostensibly a work of fiction, many aspects of the story are based on actual facts and occurrences. It is important to note that all of Barton's books share a common thread; they each have a love story, a mystery, and several underlying moral and spiritual messages.

"Whirlwinds Past and Present," with its heartwarming and unforgettable personalities will no doubt capture the heart and imagination of many readers, and for sure they will be thinking about the encounter long after the last page is turned. The journey begins with 88-year-old Meryl Jean Strom Harper having a medical emergency and then doubles back to where "Meryl Jean Another Whirlwind" ends. The ongoing story is interspersed with flashbacks that provide a glimpse into her life and struggles as well as the successes and ultimately the courage to press forward.

The truth is we all get older and that process brings predictable challenges. After literally looking death in the eye, Meryl reluctantly agrees to allow a Golden Care Nurse to make bi-weekly visits to her residence in lieu of moving to a nursing home. This requires a somewhat complicated adjustment (physically, mentally and emotionally). And after an inevitable battle of wills with Kelly, her new nurse, she finally comes to accept the inevitable, although she has a strange feeling that they had met before, even though she can't quite place the time or place. There was something about her eyes…

It was difficult to pick out passages I found myself relating to on a visceral level – there were so many – but I thought I would share a couple. See if you can relate. The first is from "Catacombs of an Ahed Mind," chapter 26:

"The oversized numbers on the alarm clock on my dresser reflected across my bedroom wall like a spotlight in the darkness. Although I had never yearned to intentionally be in one, I found myself in many spotlights over the years. As a child, it was my mother who mostly pushed me front and center. She was so proud of me and wanted everyone to know it. Her constant encouragement helped to shape my self-confidence. I didn't doubt my ability to do any of the things she repeatedly said I was gifted for. But as I look back now, I think it was more than that. My mother wasn't the only driving force. I was that kid. The one your eyes would instinctively revert back to after scanning a room filled with children. Grandma summed it up in her usual simple way. She said God put a light inside of me that was meant to shine. And just like the children's song, 'This Little Light of Mine,' I shouldn't or couldn't ever hide it under a bushel. I never did."

Growing up, my mother, much more so than my dad, was my biggest supporter. As such, these lines resonated with me in a very primeval manner. The language was slightly different, but the sentiment was definitely the same. Between my brother and my cousins, I was always the one who always seemed to draw the attention. Even now it's hard to fully explain, but I get the distinct sense that Barton "gets it."

Similarly, consider the following excerpt from chapter 36, "Last Revelation." Here we witness an exchange between Meryl and Kelly:

"Mel told me his father would constantly tell him that an education was a waste of time. He even told Mel once that he shouldn't worry about going to school when he could be working and making money. The fact that your uncle got his G.E.D. and then went to college and received a couple of degrees should be an example to any child who feels defeated because of his home life. Mel used his challenges as steppingstones to rise above his raising. That has to be honored."

The reason this struck such an emotional chord with me has to do with the fact that I was the first in my family to extend my education beyond the secondary level. Again, my mother instilled within me the importance of getting an education from an early age; my father not-so-much.

Full disclosure: I have known Barton since the publication of "Watch for the Whirlwinds" a little over ten years ago now. We recently shared breakfast at Wild Eggs on Campbell Lane. She is as

interesting and engaging in conversation as she is in her writing. We covered a wide range of topics in a relatively short period of time (a lot of them having to do with similarities/differences in our religious upbringings). She is fun to talk to.

Anyway, during that visit, Barton told me that she hopes readers enjoy – and are inspired by - this nostalgic voyage down memory lane and apply some of the life lessons she has learned to their own lives.

I don't think she – or her readers - will be disappointed. Needless to say, this one is highly recommended!

Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, University Distinguished Professor, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, WKU.

www.bgdailynews.com