

Local author's book set for release at end of month

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Contributing Writer

Young mothers often need some sort of "self-preservation method" to help maintain the sanity during those challenging years of raising infants and toddlers.

For local resident Gail Larson, that method was writing. A former music minister at an Humble church, Larson began writing devotions to get her through those hard times. She showed them to fellow congregation members, and their response was overwhelmingly positive; many said her writings had helped them as well. She eventually published them as a book, "Breathing Spaces," which debuted in 2002.

What started as a survival method for Larson herself has turned into an entity that offers relief and inspiration to others. Larson Ministries, the organization that Larson founded when the success of her writing outreach became apparent, not only publishes books (Larson's fourth book, "Ordinary Orchards," is being released at the end of this month, with her fifth and sixth to come out this January), it also hosts seminars and retreats, and the three-person staff already has events booked through May 2005.

"And one thing stems from another," says Larson. "Every time I speak, more people buy my books, and often an attendee will want to schedule another event right there on the spot."

The mission of Larson Ministries is "to make God's word real for people," says Larson, and she hopes that her work can bring "a fresh perspective to scripture" and encourage "spiritual growth."

The Iowa native has been writing stories to entertain herself since she was a little girl, climbing the

maple tree in her backyard with pencil and paper. She wrote Christmas plays for her cousins to act out, and was further encouraged by teachers and the real-life stories she absorbed in nursing school. In fact, she says that many of the characters in her second book, "From Kansas to Oz," were inspired by patients close to her and herself.

This book "is like sneaking a peak into your sister's diary," says Larson, because it is written in the perspective of three cancer patients receiving chemotherapy treatment in the same hospital room — a man in his seventies, a 40-something female nurse, and a 7-year-old boy.

Larson says this is the book to read if you've ever wondered what someone with a serious illness is felling or what to say to them. "It gives the perspective from the other side of the bed," she says. Larson knows what it's like to be on both sides, as the 27-year nursing veteran is also a 5-year survivor of cancer.

"Often when family is around, patients put up a brave front, but when the visitors leave they take off their 'happy hat' and throw it in the corner," she said. Her book reveals the "tears on the pillow at night," the wishes, desires and thoughts of such patients. But, she's quick to add, the book is not "a downer." Larson's goal in all her work is to reveal the positive side of things, to show how "a lot of faith and trust" can



Larson

get people through hard times. Therefore, she says, writing is a passion for her, that she is driven to put words down on paper to help people.

Unlike public speaking, where a person may remember a few things that were said, but the impact is usually fleeting, Larson likes the fact that a book can be put aside and picked up again later. Readers can go back and dwell on words and messages, and, she hopes, "eventually it really hits them."

She says she always has two or three projects rolling around in her head, and when she gets ready to start a book, it's all mapped out. She says she "has to get it out fast" so she won't lose any of her passion or emotion, and she usually can get a book done in three to five weeks, working morning to night.

Her newest book, "Ordinary Orchards," takes her back to her roots, and its end-of-September launch will be held at an Iowa orchard.

"The book is about how God works in our lives and how connected He wants to be. It's the fictional story of a young man's journey through life and his struggles," reports Larson.

Larson herself has had quite a few journeys in life, living in 18 different places with her oilman husband over the last 25-30 years. But she's called Texas home for quite a while now, and a Lone Star State preview of her new book will take place Sept. 17 at Columbia Lakes, where Larson

Ministries is hosting a women's retreat with the book as its theme and name.

Then comes "At the Altar Rail," in January, the second in her series of books written from the perspective of objects in the church. Her first in this genre, "The Pew," highlighted the Monday-through-Saturday lives of three families who share the same pew and pleasantries every Sunday at church, but don't really know each other and what they all go through during the week.

Larson said the message of the book is to reach out to others and really get to know them, rather than just viewing church as an hour on Sundays.

She will also write in the perspective of "The Pulpit" in this series, and the finale will be "Headstones."

Also coming in January is the sequel to her debut novel, "Breathing Spaces," this one is called "More Breathing Space."

Larson's books are published by AuthorHouse, distributed by Ingram and available at Larson Ministries events and local bookstores such as Family Christian in Humble. The books can also be ordered online at www.larsonministries.com

Visitors can learn more about the organization and its upcoming events, such as a special Christmas-themed "Real Bible Studies for Real People: Mistletoe, Memories, and Messages," to be held at Kingwood's Nathaniel Center on November 6.