

Inspired by women

First novel urges women to go for it

by Lynda Olsen
Chronotype staff

"Moon Over Madeline Island" is a lighthearted read that packs a powerful message for women.

"It's lady lit," said author Jay Gilbertson, who lives in Prairie Farm and also owns a Twin Cities hair salon with a clientele that is 85% female.

"I have so many women clients who are like Eve: in their 30s and 40s who are attractive, successful, and they're single," he said. "And they're always having to defend themselves.

"It's all right for men to be bachelors. Women become spinsters."

MAIN CHARACTERS

The book's main characters, Eve and Ruby, are long-time friends who one day wake from the stupor of daily routine to a hunger for change, challenge and fulfillment.

Like all of Gilbertson's characters, they are imperfect by current social expectations as well as by the timeless rules of common sense.

Ruby is a self-confident Brit nearing 70 whose cottage on Madeline Island is filled with happy memories of her late husband, a college professor.

"I wanted Ruby to be very refined, classic, snobby," said Gilbertson. "Ed was the shining star. I think Ruby lived in his shadow."

Ruby is energized by Eve, a workaday 40-year old who years earlier gave up her newborn daughter, became a hair stylist and owns the salon in Eau Claire where the women met. She's a little overweight and too assertive to be considered attractive.

"If you saw her you'd think, 'Oh, she's kind of tacky,'" he said. "Her fingernails are painted a bit too garish, but I like people like that."

Both women smoke: Ruby because "Europeans smoke like crazy," and Eve because it's another irritating characteristic that she must overcome in readers' eyes.

Eve is also a worrier, which Gilbertson finds fun as a writer and which strengthens the bond between the women.

"Ruby is very steadfast and true. She's extremely focused. She can make decisions," said Gilbertson. "She always has an answer, whereas Eve flounders, just as I do."

But once the decision is made, it is Eve who swings into action and gets things done, a characteristic that draws people to her and that could be Ruby's



Another door

Above, Prairie Farm writer Jay Gilbertson enjoys the brilliant color of the delphiniums at his Prairie Farm home. He and his partner, Ken Seguire, plan to expand their delphiniums and peonies for sale in the future.

motive for suggesting that they abandon the familiar and rebuild their lives on Madeline Island.

NEW ENDEAVOR

The novel is Gilbertson's first literary effort since he asked his father, Eric Gilbertson, to help him write a short story for a class at the UW-Stout because of his skill at storytelling, spelling and grammar.

"Of course we did it the weekend before it was due, and it was a blast," said Gilbertson. "It was

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