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Award-winning Volusia author Ginger Pinholster returns with 'Snakes of St. Augustine'



Jim Abbott

Daytona Beach News-Journal

As author Ginger Pinholster was putting the finishing touches on her latest novel, “Snakes of St. Augustine,” she brought home a new pet, a lemon-colored ball python that she named Lemony Stitches.

“I was heavy into revisions for the book at the time, so I had snakes on my mind every day, all day,” said Pinholster, a Ponce Inlet resident who will celebrate publication of “Snakes of St. Augustine” (Regal House, \$19.95) with a book-signing and reading on at 2:30 p.m. Saturday at the Barnes & Noble of Tomoka Town Center in Daytona Beach.



The new book revolves around the theft of a trio of beloved snakes that coincides with a sister's desperate search for her missing brother. Along the way, a series of unlikely connections develop among complicated characters that live and work in the shadow of the tourism district of historic St. Augustine.

It's the follow-up to Pinholster's 2019 debut novel, "City In a Forest," which garnered a Gold Royal Palm Literary Award from the Florida Writer's Association.

Pinholster, vice president of communications at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, will be joined at the event by Volusia County Poet Laureate M.B.

McLatchey, who also will read and sign copies of her 2021 memoir, “Beginner’s Mind.”



That book recounts how McLatchey, a humanities professor at Embry-Riddle, was influenced by a gifted teacher in a fourth-grade classroom in a New England shipyard town.

'Snakes of St. Augustine' fiction inspired by real events

For Pinholster, “Snakes of St. Augustine” was inspired by a combination of factors that include her passionate interest in herpetology, but also her personal experiences with family members and loved ones dealing with degrees of mental illness or neurodiversity, conditions woven into the depictions of two of the book’s central characters.

ADVERTISING

Her initial interest in exploring the subject was sparked after seeing news reports of 2014 incident in Dallas when a 38-year-old man with psychosis was killed by police officers after his mother called authorities for help getting him to a hospital.



Pinholster also lost her younger brother to mental illness nearly 20 years ago, she said.

“From that experience, I learned that people reacted to his differences in various ways,” she said. “They might think he was funny; they might be afraid of him, or they didn’t understand his behavior.”

“The book has plenty of funny scenes and I want readers to both laugh and cry, but it’s fundamentally about a serious topic,” she said, “the dangers faced by people living with neurodiversity, in particular mental health conditions.”

Spotlight on another local author: 'These Strange Matters': Port Orange author explores sci-fi short stories in debut book

ADVERTISING

For Pinholster, the cast of serpents that inspire the book’s title reflect more than a window into Florida’s well-documented laundry list of oddities.

“The snakes are a metaphor for mental health issues,” she said. “They are feared and misunderstood. People run away from them or even kill them on sight.

“That’s much the same way people with certain conditions are feared, misunderstood and face increased risk of harm by others. There are at least 44 native species of snakes in Florida, but only six are venomous. You’re unlikely to run into unless one unless you’re looking for them.”

Pinholster worked for five years on new book

Pinholster spent five years working on “Snakes of St. Augustine,” which has been praised for its “singular Florida charm” by novelist Laura McBride (“We Are Called to Rise”; “In the Midnight Room”).

“The novel reads sometimes like a thriller, sometimes like a love story, sometimes like a family drama,” McBride also wrote in her appraisal.



For Pinholster, the hope is that readers will take away a more important message from the story.

“I want them to both laugh and cry, and to think about how much we are all similar, why we need to reach out to each other,” she said. “Community is critical to our health and we’re too often focused on screens rather than person who lives next door to us or across the street.

“That’s what I wanted to do with the book, showcase the importance of community.”

If you go

WHAT: Book signing and reading of "Snakes of St. Augustine" with Volusia County author Ginger Pinholster and Daytona Beach poet laureate M.B. McLatchey ("Beginner's Mind").

WHEN: Reading and conversation from 2:30-3:30 p.m. Saturday

WHERE: Barnes & Noble of Tomoka Town Center, 1115 Cornerstone Blvd.
Ste C, Daytona Beach

ONLINE:gingerpinholster.com