

Text Interview with Pam Webber, author of *The Wiregrass*

1. What motivated you to write *The Wiregrass*?

First, I wanted to put a spotlight on this extraordinary region of the Deep South and its warm and inviting people. Second, I wanted to honor some very special people who have influenced my life, and third, I wanted to draw attention to crimes against children. Children are the most vulnerable among us and crimes against them often go unnoticed or unreported.

2. What was the most challenging part of writing *The Wiregrass*?

Developing skill in writing Southern dialog was the biggest challenge. I wanted the dialog to be authentic to Southern Culture at that time without sacrificing readability.

3. The uniqueness of the Wiregrass emerged as a character in the story. Was this intentional?

Absolutely. It is impossible to understand Southern culture much less the culture within the Wiregrass, if those things that make them unique are not prominent in the story. When folks read this book, I want them to feel as if they are actually there. And, if they are ever lucky enough visit the Southern Wiregrass, I hope they feel as if they're coming home.

4. The shenanigans in the lighter sections of *The Wiregrass* are laugh out loud funny. Did you intend for humor to play a major role in the story?

Yes. Life is a continuum of happiness to sadness and back, and I wanted the lives of the characters to reflect that. I also wanted the readers to see that we are responsible for our own happiness.

5. Was it difficult writing from a young adult perspective?

Once I learned not to let adult inhibitions temper the language and the feelings of the younger characters, writing was simple and refreshing. I was also able to pull from my experience at that age, which was fun.

6. The story includes a focus on Southern foods and even has some of the recipes from the story included in the back of the book. Why was this important to the story?

The story takes place in the rural south where fishing, growing plentiful gardens, and living close to the land were considered essential skills for most folks. Food is a dynamic part of Southern Culture, so for the story to be realistic it had to be included. From a more practical perspective, scenes involving gardens, fishing, and meals provide the background for important dialog.

7. The soldiers and helicopters from Fort Rucker, the aviation center of the US Army, play an interesting and surprising role in the story. What made you decide to include them?

In the late 1960s, America was heavily involved in the Vietnam War and helicopters were an integral part of that effort. Training for the helicopter pilots and crews was taking place 24/7 at Fort Rucker's main base and the many satellite-training fields scattered across the Wiregrass. It would have been unrealistic for the time and place not to include them. Plus, they support the storyline beautifully.

8. How much of *The Wiregrass* is drawn from your experience?

Everyone who writes fiction brings a small part of themselves and their experience into their writings. My mother was born and raised in the Wiregrass so we would spend part of our summer vacations there. She came from a large family, so we had wonderful cousins to spend time with. We'd go fishing, swimming, junking, get into mischief, and do a lot of front porch rocking. On a darker note, as a nurse I've seen horrendous crimes committed against children. Those experiences touched my soul and hurt my heart, not only for the innocent victims, but because research has shown us that many abusers were abused as children.