

NewsWatch

Writer says hold on to dreams

Key Points

- Need to make a living turns writer into ag economist.
- Love of craft leads economist back to writing.
- Finding a niche leads to success in writing world.

By P.J. GRIEKSPoor

SARAH Fogelman took a detour or two along the road to her final destination as a full-time fiction writer.

She talked a bit about those detours and about staying focused on your dreams when she addressed a lunch crowd at the annual Women Managing the Farm conference in Hutchinson in February.

Fogelman grew up on a farm in Oklahoma and said she learned early to “spend time inside my head” making up stories.

“I always knew I would write in my spare time,” she said. “But my mom and dad taught me to be practical. I had to make a living.”

So she studied agricultural economics and got a job with Kansas State University.

“I landed in Chanute, Kan., single and 24,” she said. “It wasn’t exactly ‘Sex and the City.’ I had a little time on my hands.”

She dusted off something she had written as a screenplay and started filling spiral notebooks with her first novel, which she describes as being about “mental illness, murder, farming and ranching, with a little insurance fraud thrown in.”

Slowly, the pile of spiral notebooks grew into a book, and she began putting it into a computer.

“I realized that if you want to follow your dreams, you can’t wait for everything to be perfect,” Fogelman said. “You have to get started.”

So, she registered for a writers’ conference and looked for an agent.

Rejections, then success

There were more bumps: a pile of rejections, a failure at rewrite, a sale that didn’t find market success. Victory finally came in a niche: books for young teens.

“My agent called me and asked if I ever thought about writing for teenagers,” she said. “She said, ‘You are really clean and kind of immature. I think you’d be good at it,’” Fogelman recalled. “I said ‘sure’ even though I was a long way from it.”

Her first ideas were “just awful” she said, but then something clicked while she was watching a rerun of “Alias,” a story about a young undercover spy.

“I wasn’t really watching it. I was working with the TV on and the sound off. It doesn’t count if you turn the sound off.”

The images of the show spurred an idea for a story about a young girl in an elite school for spies who falls in love with a “normal” boy.



FOLLOWING DREAMS: Sarah Fogelman, who writes as Ally Carter, talks to women gathered at the Women Managing the Farm conference about following your dreams to success. Fogelman worked as an ag economist for Kansas State University before finally pursuing her dream of being a full-time writer. She now has two top sellers in the books for teens genre.

“I Could Tell You I Love You, But Then I’d Have to Kill You” brought success. Fogelman followed with “Cross My Heart and Hope to Spy” and is now working on a third novel in the same genre.

But with success came more change. Her name as a writer is not Sarah Fogelman.

“There was a problem,” she said. “My agent said if teenage girls Googled ‘Sarah Fogelman’ they would find a bunch of soybean cost-return analyses and they’d never believe it was me. I needed a pen name. She suggested something that started with a ‘C’ because it would put me where she wanted me on the bookstore shelves.”

Fogelman circled names in the phone book, first and last.

“Then, being an ag economist, I made a spreadsheet,” she said. “I did random sorts and after a while, Ally Carter was created.”

Fogelman, who only recently quit her job as an economist to write full time, has moved back to Tulsa to be closer to her family.

She said she likes public speaking, especially to groups of women, because it gives her a chance to encourage others to stick with what they knew they wanted to do when they were 12 years old — “the age of purest aspirations, before life gets in your way.”

Someday, she says, she may sell that novel of murder and mental illness, farming and ranching and insurance fraud. It has a working title, “Greenwood Burning.” And when it sells, she said, the writer will be Sarah Fogelman.

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