

RoseMary Covington Morgan
Interview by Sue Staats

After a long career in transit development and planning, RoseMary Covington Morgan came back full circle to something she'd loved as a child: making up stories. She's a longtime member and current president of Black Women Write, a Sacramento organization that supports and encourages writing in all genres by Black women. It's been the most important part of her development as a writer, but I wanted to go back to where it all began — the stories she wrote as a child and what inspired her to write again decades later.

Edited for length and clarity.

Sue: RoseMary, I know you came back to writing after decades away from it. And I was wondering what sparked that return to something you'd loved as a child?

RoseMary: Well, I think my experience was like a lot of people's: I retired. And then a year later, my husband passed and suddenly I had a lot of time on my hands. And I'd always wanted to write. When he was alive, he always said, "Well, why don't you just do it?" And I always said that I had a job that required me to do this, and this — I worked all day and into the evening sometimes and I just didn't have the energy anymore. So, it was kind of as a tribute to him that I started writing and found out that I *can* write, which was a little bit of a surprise because I hadn't done any fiction writing. Most of my writing was around policy papers, issue papers and things of that sort — grant applications, all the kind of writing that went along with the job I had. So when I went back to what I'd done as a kid, writing stories, it was a surprise to me that I still could. That I still got that little girl.

Sue: Tell me, do you remember the first story you wrote as a kid?

RoseMary: I remember one story. It was about a woman called Audrey who was a slave. I would write stories and then pass them around in class, which I really shouldn't have been doing. And my classmates would read them while they were sitting in class. I recall people asking me for that story more than anything. And it was a similar theme to the novel I've finished and hope to have published in the spring. I also used to write stories about these little plastic men I had. I'd line them up along the dresser and write about them being in war, or in love — all things an 11-, 12-, 13-year-old girl would write about. I was also a big reader, so a lot of what I read came into what I was writing at that time.

Sue: It's exciting to hear that you have a novel finished and ready to be published in the spring.

RoseMary: That's the plan. I was working with one publisher, but I pulled out because it was going to be very expensive. You have to do pre-sales and none of that money would be coming to me. So I talked with a good friend who'd been through the same program and she said it wasn't worth it. That's the long way of saying I'm going to self-publish the book! It's not as good for my ego as when I thought I was going with a private publisher, but my goal right now is to get the book out there so people can read it.

Sue: I've heard of many books published through, for instance, the Amazon platforms that have done very well. And, as you say, at least they're getting out there in front of readers. So, congratulations for forging ahead.

RoseMary: Thank you. I'm going to have to do a big marketing campaign. It scares me a little, and you know, it's funny, because all of my career, I've been in public talking to people, doing panels. But

somehow, because writing is so personal, I feel a little trepidation about getting in front of people talking about my writing.

Sue: I understand you're a member — in fact, acting president — of Black Women Write, a Sacramento-based writing salon. I'm told that one of the things you do is encourage members to not only write, but to get their work published. Sounds like you're following your own guidelines.

RoseMary: Yes, and I have to credit Stephanie Bray, who started the organization, and her prompts for getting me back into the habit of writing. A lot of our members have done really well, getting their work published.

Sue: Tell me about the story being read at Stories on Stage. It's called "Wishful Thinking," and I'm curious about what inspired that story. Was it one of Stephanie's prompts or something else?

RoseMary: Everything I write is based on personal experience, so that story is based on personal experience. Although I can't say exactly what the personal experience was. Like many people, I've had good relationships and better relationships, and that story depicts a relationship where the couple seems to still love each other, but they just can't make it work. I guess it came from thinking about that. I don't want to say that I had a relationship like that, it's a work of fiction. It's not autobiographical. But like I said, like many people, I've had relationships with the one who got away. And this is kind of the one who got away.

Sue: Well, it's a very effective story, for sure. I know that I was really rooting for them to be together and sad when they didn't end up that way. RoseMary, I noticed in your bio you name many cities where you've lived. What got you moving all over the country? And how did you end up in Sacramento?

RoseMary: Well, the transit industry, which is where I was employed for the majority of my career, is like that. Usually, you have one major transit agency in a city, so if you want to advance in your field, you have to go somewhere else. So I went from St. Louis to Cleveland to Washington D.C. And then I made the stupidest move of my career — I went to work at the District of Columbia. It sounded so exciting. They had all these new projects that they wanted me to be in charge of, so I took that job against the advice of some people who probably knew more about Washington politics than I did. And, predictably, when the administration changed, I was left without a job. Fortunately, I had contacts in the industry and soon was choosing between Hampton, Virginia, and Sacramento. I was sure I'd be going to Virginia because to my husband, California was going to drop off the continent into the ocean. They brought us out for the city tour and there were orange trees growing on the street and in the backyards and that was the most remarkable thing that he had ever seen. We went to wine country, went to Lodi, visited the farmers market under the freeway. And by the time we left Sacramento, he was ready to move here. I had to hold him back and say, "Well, let's see what kind of offer we get!" By the time he passed, he was never leaving California. He loved it here.

Sue: You know, I think for a lot of people, it's the oranges. It certainly was for me!

RoseMary: Yes, exactly. We had an orange tree and a lemon tree and peach tree and even an avocado tree that only produced one avocado in the five or six years that we lived there. It was just wonderful to go out in our backyard and pull them off the tree.

Sue: I have one last question for you. Your story is going to be read by an actor and I was wondering how you were thinking about that. Are you excited? Anxious? Nervous? Have you ever heard your work read out loud by someone else?

RoseMary: Well, yes, I have. I have some problems with my voice right now and so one of the women in my critique group read one of my stories out loud for me. And you know, frankly, I was quite pleased with the way it sounded. I'm excited to see how this is going to turn out — actually, I'm thrilled. And my friends and family will be there. My children will probably ask me which boyfriend this was! But yes, I'm excited. A lot of the stories I write, I write because I think they're stories that can be read out loud. So, this is the first time that is really going to happen and I'm really excited.

Sue: RoseMary, we're looking forward to it also. Thank you so much.

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