

Unexpected inspiration

Local author struck with idea for fourth novel while in parking lot

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Inspiration can strike a person almost anywhere as author Vicki Allen has learned.

Her first novel, "For Molly," came to her in high school but remained dormant for many years inside the closet of her room at her parents house.

The idea for her fourth and newest book, however, came out of nowhere in April of last year while she was sitting in her car in the parking lot of the U.S. Post Office in Pineville.

"They just popped into my mind," Allen said of the characters in "Drink One to Me, Christian Bennett."

"I don't know where it came from."

The book follows unsatisfied American photographer Abigail Christensen, who longs to find her way outside the expectations of her wealthy family. She travels with her brother to Mexico to find adventure in the images she captures for an upcoming exhibition.

The siblings' fun unravels when Abigail catches the eye of selfish and violent drug lord Esai Molinero. He abducts the young photographer and brings her into a world of suspense and intrigue.

Though she wrote the book in just under six months, "Drink One to Me, Christian Bennett" required much from its author. Allen said she spent the first two sleepless weeks of the composition trying to map out the characters and storyline.

During that time in her "hut" – a separate building from her house in which she pursues her creative endeavors – Allen was able to crank out 150 pages of the story, but she needed more research to help give life to the



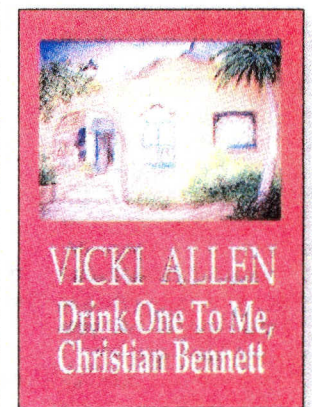
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Local author Vicki Allen talks about her latest book "Drink One to Me, Christian Bennett," at Sentry Drug in Alexandria.

vibrant culture surrounding the characters.

She looked for inspiration in the rhythm of Latin music and pored over endless articles and information about the customs of the region that could add color and authenticity to the setting.

The book also required her to write more male characters into one story than she ever had in her past books, Allen said. A balance also had to be struck between the "R-rated" world of drug culture and the "PG-13" feel she was seeking.



KNOW TO GO

What: Book signing for "Drink One to Me, Christian Bennett" by Vicki Allen

When: 1-4 p.m., today

Where: Louisiana State University at Alexandria bookstore

"I had to not be shy about some of things these guys do," said Allen, who lets the story dictate the action while she merely reins it into the realm of feasibility. "I learned to let go of expectations a long time ago."

She wrote the book during the times she was not working as a full-time pharmacist at Sentry Drug or being a the mother of two teenage sons living at home, Allen said. Thoughts and ideas often came to her while she was away from her hut, which is why she always carried a notebook or found other ways to record them.

"I'm always scrawling on notebooks, envelopes and Post-It notes," said Allen, who is currently working on three other books.

Now, she is gearing up for a 12-stop book signing tour of



Amanda Guillot/aguillot@thetowntalk.com

Local author Vicki Allen talks about her latest book "Drink One for Me, Christian Bennett," at Sentry Drug in Alexandria. Allen said she always keeps a notebook handy to jot down ideas when they strike her.

Allen

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sorts that will carry her across the state and into Mississippi, Texas and Tennessee, starting with a book signing from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. today at the Louisiana State University at Alexandria bookstore.

"It's going to be a busy fall," Allen said.

The book is available locally at Waldenbooks in the Alexandria Mall, Fads and Frames on Wimbledon Boulevard and Sentry Drug on Third Street in downtown Alexandria. It is also available online from Barnes and Noble, Amazon and Magnolia Publishing, which published the book.

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