



**Laurel Lee and her husband, [Mike Thaler](#)**

### **‘A life of blessings’**

Story by: Diana Schweitzer

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“A miracle is an exception to a statistic or an exceptional statistic . . . I’ve known a lot of miracles,” said Laurel Lee, rural Canby author, as I sit listening to her talk about her life experiences — from being terminally diagnosed with Hodgkin’s disease at age 29, to raising three children on her own, from being diagnosed with terminal pancreatic cancer at 58 to traveling the world.

All which have influenced her autobiographical writing and her newest book, “Tapestry: The Journey of Laurel Lee.”

The first editions of Tapestry were released Monday, July 5. It is an autobiographical tapestry woven together with Lee’s life experiences.

It includes more than 90 drawings by Lee and more than 60 photos which portray her struggles, dreams, adventures, family and love.

The book begins in the 1960s as Lee hitchhikes to Alaska to homestead, and winds through the 1970s and 1980s as Laurel is diagnosed with fourth stage Hodgkin’s disease and is abandoned by her husband. Surviving her diagnosis through her believe in God and her determination to live, the story eloquently weaves through her survival of the disease and into the 1990s.

The book takes readers to the present time, to her marriage to Mike Thaler, a well-known New York children’s book writer, as well as her relationships with her children, grandchildren and friends.

Her journal ends with Thanksgiving Day 2003 as she is facing advanced pancreatic cancer.

When doctors diagnosed Lee with pancreatic cancer in October 2003, shortly before her 58 birthday, they said that no one has ever survived the prognosis.

Her doctor gave her three to eight months to live.

Though to some the thought of dying may seem devastating, Lee is very optimistic about the life she has lived and where she will go when she passes from this world.

*“Maybe it’s my time . . . I have peace. The standard reply to any deep tragedy is an affirmation that God can do anything . . . I don’t want to diminish the time I do have by constantly interceding for more. My attitude comes in trusting Him with all my heart and not leaning on my own understanding.” — **October 21, page 276.***

In the late-1970s, when Lee was 29 years old, she was diagnosed with Hodgkin’s disease and told by doctors she would die.

Her husband, unable to cope, abandoned her and three little children to fend for themselves.

While Lee fought desperately for her life, she kept a journal, which students at Oregon Health and Science University where she was hospitalized gave to the doctor who was the speaker at their graduation commencement.

That doctor gave Lee’s journal to his publisher in New York, which published it.

Her heartfelt diary became “Walking Through The Fire,” her first book, which sold more than 300,000 copies and was distributed in 52 countries.

“Sometimes, the invisible are stronger than the visible,” she said of her will to survive her first diagnosis.

Lee said her current diagnosis with the terminal illness is different now than when she was 29.

“Before, I had three pre-schoolers. Now they’re raised and living interesting lives,” she said. “Heaven to me is such a reality and I have been waiting to go there for a long time. I can’t quite see the clear picture, but I know it’s there.”

She is currently at home as part of a hospice program, with family and friends seeing to her around the clock, living in what she calls the “butterfly moments.”

She’s lost some of her hair from the many medications she is on and recently cut it really short, but her tender hearted spirit hasn’t faded.

Her book Tapestry is long awaited by the nearly half million readers who bought her last four books, said Lee’s publicist Deborah Dombrowski. The book reveals the details of her life since her first book was released in the 1970s.

“The book is the life story of Lee, a once-named ‘rags-to-riches Cinderella of literature,’” added Dombrowski.

It includes many of the “miracles” that have touched Lee’s life, some large some small, all impacting. Through her life stories painted in the book, a consistent language of grace, faith and a special lyrical intensity surface.

“It’s a joy to publish it,” said Lee. “It’s very fulfilling . . . It’s a gift to me to publish it in my last year in life.”

She said throughout her short 58 years, writing has become a hobby to her. She has kept many journals and written many memoirs, most of which she never intends to publish.

“I like to write about life,” she said. “Stories need to be thrown into the wind to see where they go.”

*“I think of my week and all the coins of provision that were added to my begging bowl as an impoverished traveler. First, the ticket was free; it was transferable. It was the gift of a girlfriend who had done some work for the airlines. . . Next came the job offer but for too many months to be an acceptable invitation with my children.*

*“I took the train north, and in my few days rode down the Mekong River, took elephants up steep mountain trails, and visited a nomadic tribe that had lost their written language long ago from ingesting opium.” — 1988, Bangkok, Thailand, pages 210-11*

After surviving her first diagnosis of cancer, Lee traveled the world teaching and exploring in Bangkok, Thailand; Botswana, Africa; Moscow, Russia; Zululand, South Africa; London, England; Mexico, Philippines, Australia, Ukraine and China. She refers to her travel as a good education and a good journey.

“I travel off the map. Give me an elephant and make me go,” she said.

In her years of travel and adventures she rode many elephants, traveled off the beaten path and met many new people that she considers friends.

Lee taught creative writing and publishing as a professor at George Fox University in Newberg, where she served as a writer in residence for eight years. She also served as a guest lecturer and taught writing and publishing classes at universities around the world.

She said the way her life has unfolded “has been a wonderful surprise” and that though she has had some low times, the high points in her life outweigh the bad.

“I feel richer because of it . . . a lot more richer because of it,” Lee said.

Over the last year, Lee said she has lived an accelerated course in dying, and though at times it has been painful, she has learned a lot through her relationships and experiences.

After all, she said, relationships are what life is about.

Lee has also written books “Walking through the Fire,” “Signs of Spring,” “Mourning into Dancing,” “Godspeed: Hitchhiking Home,” “To Comfort You,” and six children’s books.

Lee has three children. They are Matthew and his wife Tina of Canby, Anna and husband Peter Cairny of Portland, and Mary Elizabeth of San Francisco, and four grandchildren Rebekah Faith, Elizabeth Grace, Matthew Jonathan, and Hannah Joy, all of Canby.

Lee and her husband, Mike, have lived in rural Canby for about six years, prior to that living in West Linn.

Updates on Lee’s health condition can be found on her publisher’s web site at [www.lighthouse-trails.com](http://www.lighthouse-trails.com).

Books are for sale at Rainbow West Bible and Books in Canby, and can also be ordered online at [www.lighthouse-trails.com](http://www.lighthouse-trails.com), or by calling 1-866-876-3910.