

Daughter's dream of job spurs author

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For those blessed few of you out there who've always stepped sure-footed into the future, who've moved through life without a moment's regret, then congratulations, you are the envy of the rest of us, and you need read no further.

But for those of you who've had second thoughts about your chosen path, then take heart in Patti Callahan Henry's story.

For years, she lived the life some imagine: a suburban mom with kids and a supportive husband, all living in an impeccably decorated home near the banks of the Chattahoochee River. As good as she was at being a wife and mom, the former pediatric nurse had become even better at beating back the dream of what she really wanted to do with her

life.

Six years ago, while playing with her daughter Megan one day, "what if" caught up with Henry.

She had asked Megan what she thought she wanted to do when she grew up.

Be a writer, Megan said. "It was like somebody punched me in the stomach," Henry said. "I was thinking, 'No, that's my dream; that's what I wanted to be.'"

It was just the push the Norcross woman needed to take a different road.

In May, Penguin/NAL published Henry's first book, "Losing the Moon." On its face, it's a bit of a romance, the tale of a woman who runs into her long-lost college boyfriend and the choices she has to make. But ultimately the book is about answering "what if," about making your way down the path you did



First-time novelist Patti Callahan Henry realized her quashed desire to pen a book after her daughter confessed she wanted to be a writer when she grew up.

choose.

"Moon" already has picked up national steam. Woman's Day magazine selected the book as one of its "great" summer reads. Atlanta Woman magazine noted it in its Bookshelf column. And Henry was selected to participate in Montblanc's Great American Love Story promotion, along with Candace Bushnell of "Sex in the City" fame and Jackie Collins, among others.

It's the response for which Henry had hoped, but not what she expected, especially

since she has been writing full time for only four years.

After her conversation with Megan, "I kept it a secret in my heart for about two years, even from my husband," Henry said. "I wasn't ready to say out loud, 'This is my dream.'"

But once she decided that nothing would beat failure but a try, writing consumed her. She read everything she could by C.S. Lewis, Pat Conroy, Anne Rivers Siddons and whoever else moved her.

She started keeping a journal more faithfully. She

sharply cut back on her volunteer work so she could take writing classes at Emory University and attend weekend writer's conferences. She rose at 4:30 a.m. and wrote in long-hand until 6:30, when it was time to get her kids ready for school. Eventually, she got the courage to enter some writing contests. And slowly "Losing the Moon" began to take shape.

It was as much Henry's own story as the one she wrote in "Moon" that inspired Mary Rose Taylor to establish an emerging writer's series at the Margaret Mitchell House and Museum.

Normally the Margaret Mitchell House spotlights long-established authors with powerhouse reputations. But something about Henry's book moved Taylor, she said. It wasn't great literature in the

highbrow sense, but it spoke authentically to the large audience of young, dual-career couples trying to come to terms with the realities of their lives in the face of their long-ago dreams, she said.

"This is a woman who is like many struggling authors, but she's managed to pull it off," Taylor said. "She wrote a book, got an agent and got published. She didn't just talk about it, and she made it happen while her kids were still young and in school. I admire the discipline it took to do that."

Henry is working on her second book, which again will deal with themes of facing the truth of your life. Now that Henry has dealt with hers, she said, there's no turning back.

"I'm exactly where I need to be now," she said.