

BOOKS

Moving journey awaits readers

"There is no filing system for memories, no place to slot them by year or name or category. They are either wispy and soft as twilight dancing on the water or hard as the jagged edge of the oyster bed slicing your feet to shreds before you know you've been cut." These are the words of a Lowcountry girl named Kara Larson, whose memories are of both kinds



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and give her no peace.

Kara seemed to have everything — a handsome and successful fiancée, a job she loves, close friends and a supportive if sometimes troubled family. But she cannot avoid memories of a mother who seemed to give up her fight to live and left behind her children and husband, and of Jack Sullivan, whom Kara had loved deeply as a teenager and then lost forever.

Most of the time Kara drives these thoughts from her mind. She is not only deeply involved in her wedding plans, but carries much of the responsibility for arranging a major golf tournament being held in her home island of Palmetto Pointe. One of the favorites to win it is her husband-to-be, a charming and self-confident professional golfer named Peyton



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Ellers, and she wants him to be as proud of her professionalism as she is of his.

Then into her life comes a 96-year-old Irish woman named Maeve Mahoney. Kara has been assigned to Mrs. Mahoney as part of her community service for the Palmetto Pointe Junior Society and dreads the chore of making conversation with an old woman as much as she resents the time it will take out of her overcrowded schedule.

Then, in a mesmerizing lilt, Maeve Mahoney begins telling the story of her life and of her first love, Richard O'Leary, who was lost to her many years before. Prompted by Maeve's story, Kara begins telling her about her own lost love,

Review

'When Light Breaks'

By Patti Callahan Henry

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whose mother took him away in her flight from an abusive husband. Jack Sullivan has promised to write and for a time he did, but then the letters stopped and she had heard nothing for almost 15 years.

As Maeve continues telling of her lost romance, Kara begins to see parallels between the old woman's experience and her own. And she sees that she has much to learn from a woman who has never stopped hoping that her love will return to her. Maeve also has much wisdom to pass along to Kara. "All of our lives we must choose between what others define us to be and who we were meant to be," he says. "Base your choices on what you believe, on who you truly are."

As her wedding day approaches, Kara learns where Jack Sullivan is. Despite warnings from her friends and the disapproval of her father and sister, she is determined to see him and find out once and for all if the feelings she once held for Sullivan are still alive. Knowing

she is risking her marriage and her happiness, she sets off in a driving rainstorm to find him.

Author Patti Callahan Henry believes strongly in the power of a story to change lives, and in the lessons one generation can teach another. "I believe that our minds communicate through reason and intellect," she says, "but the heart communicates through story."

She is also deeply affected by the lush beauty of the Carolina Lowcountry, and writes about it with lyrical feelings. She describes her home as "a place encircled by river, estuary, marsh and ocean all at once; bodies of water cushioning us like the earth's pillow." She talks of the river "shrouded in early-morning mist; the hummocks and spartina blended together in the grey-silver dawn. The oyster shells glowing in the rising sun . . ." Kara has never left her Lowcountry home and believes she never will.

As she did in her earlier novels, "Losing the Moon" and "Where the River Runs," Henry writes movingly about love and family and the voyage we all take to discover what we really value, who we really are. She has been compared to Pat Conroy and Anne Rivers Siddons, and she proves once again that she belongs in their distinguished company.

Don McKinney, author of "Magazine Writing That Sells," is *The Island Packet* book reviewer.