

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

PATTI CALLAHAN
HENRY

"Patti Callahan Henry
has written the best novel of her
career."—Dorothea Benton Frank,
New York Times bestselling author

the
bookshop
at
water's
end

A NOVEL

BOOK CLUB KIT

the bookshop at water's end

Dear Reader,

I am so pleased to bring you my newest novel, *The Bookshop at Water's End*—my love letter to bookshops and readers alike. Since childhood, bookshops and libraries have been my sanctuary, places where I could find the next story to help me understand the world around me. It is there I also found companions who loved stories and between-the-pages adventures as I did. Oh, don't we all love how the community and warmth of bookshops can bring us together? And that is exactly what happens to the characters in this book, as they navigate their complicated lives, unfold mysteries from the past, and rediscover love stories that need mending.

The Bookshop at Water's End is set in South Carolina, between a river house and a bookshop. It is there we meet Bonny Blankenship, an emergency room doctor who has made a tragic error in the ER and has packed up her troubled nineteen-year-old daughter, Piper, to return to the summer family home she hasn't visited in almost thirty years. Soon Bonny's childhood best friend, Lainey, joins them with her two small children. But it's not as simple as two best friends reuniting, because during their last summer as young, innocent 13 year olds, Lainey's mother disappeared and Bonny fell in love with Lainey's brother. Now, back in the place where it all began and seemingly ended, they reunite with the bookshop owner, Mimi, who knows more than she's willing to tell.

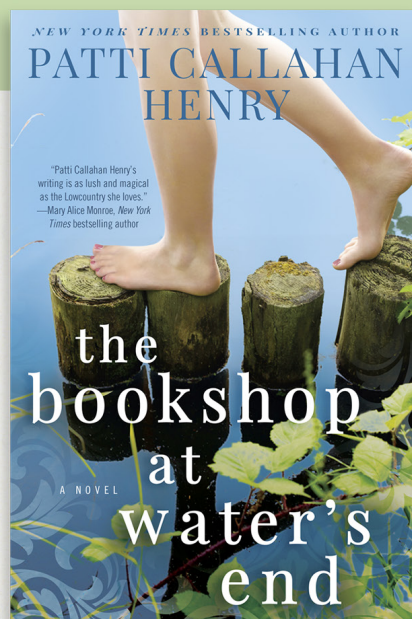
It is this return to the shore that unlocks the answers to a past mystery. Welcome to the lives of Bonny, Piper and Lainey—where the past will change the future, where memory is locked inside the geography of the lush Lowcountry and where one small bookshop at Watersend brings it all together.

With Love and Gratitude,
Patti Callahan Henry

The Story Behind the Story PATTI CALLAHAN HENRY

*“Landscape is memory and
memory is landscape,”*

*states Bonny Blankenship in
The Bookshop at Water’s End.*



This was the very thought that blew through my mind when I visited my childhood summer cabin after being gone for thirty years, and then my character uttered this same sentiment.

All novels start somewhere, and often we can't identify that place, but here with *The Bookshop at Water's End*, I can. Visiting that childhood summer vista, I thought so very much about what it meant to “return” home. I wanted to explore the idea of home being both an external place as well as an internal landscape. It is often a childhood geography that awakens old memories.

The cabin of my childhood summers sits in the woods of Orleans, Massachusetts, on a hill a few miles from the beaches of Cape Cod. It dwells in an ethereal forest that appears in my dreams or in odd whispers of memory. When I hear the word “summertime”, I think immediately of this place and the child I was.

Behind the cedar shake cabin there is a glacial lake, aptly named Crystal Lake. I once believed it to be bottomless (I'm quite sure my dad told us so), and that the Loch Ness Monster lived there, lurking in the darker depths. There's also a dock that dominates my memories. It was a floating wooden square of splintered wood that Mom and Dad would pull into the middle of the lake on the first day of summer, where they would drop the anchor to the dark bottom. My sister, Barbi, and I were commissioned to scrub it clean of seagull poop every few days. When we'd finish, we'd float under that dock in the small space where one could hide and breathe between the floaters and the water, hidden inside the world of that dark and mysterious lake. All things were possible then; the world was waiting.

The days were aimless and sublime, full of the wonder nature can deliver when we are quiet enough. Long hours were spent roaming the woods, stumbling upon cranberry bogs, learning to sail in a tiny Sailfish across a lake that seemed huge. I also disappeared into books, spending entire days without any sense of time—my great love of story began in the bend and curves of that house and that land.



Young Patti in Cape Cod



Patti and her sisters on Crystal Lake behind the house

We all have an internal geography, and this often echoes an external landscape somewhere in the world, and this was mine.

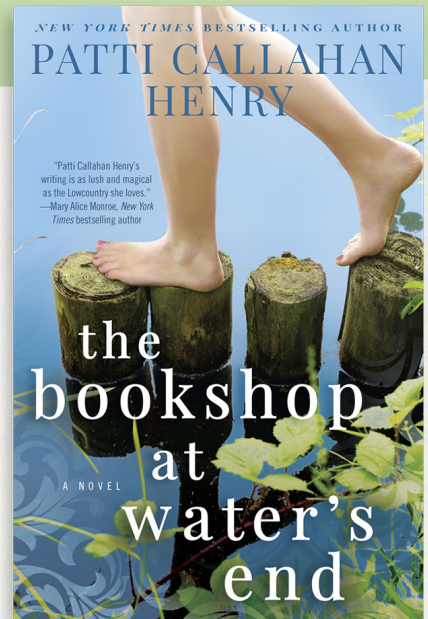
A few summers ago, I finagled the family into returning. My mom and dad, my two sisters and now our own families—husbands and kids in tow. My three children, aged twenty-three, twenty-one and seventeen, were curious but only mildly so. At first I desperately wanted them to understand the impact of the setting and cabin, of the lake and the forest and the cranberry bogs. It didn't take long to realize that it didn't matter if it impacted them the same way it had me, because it had already influenced their lives in ways they would never fully understand.

When we piled into our cars to go to Orleans, I asked for the address: Meg's Lane, I was told. I'd forgotten the name of the road. But had I really? Because it hit me—I had named my daughter, my firstborn, Meagan. I thought I'd chosen her name because it is Irish and lovely and means "a pearl". But all along had *Meg's Lane* been whispering through my subconscious as something sublime and innocent, something so eternally mine that I cast that name upon my daughter? I don't know but it seems entirely plausible.

As my own children were growing up, I tried to replicate this sense of summer, and did so in the Lowcountry of South Carolina where the wild May River runs to the sea.

And I wanted the same geography for my characters in *The Bookshop At Water's End*, for women who were coming home to themselves. So I offered them a summer-home that echoed their life destinies, conflicts, secrets and tragedies.

I asked: When things don't work out the way we desire, when our life is upended and change is forced upon us, where do we turn? Hopefully to a sense of home within, to that soul-place that is immovable and strong and waiting for us. I wanted my characters Bonny, Lainey and Piper to find their own way home, back to themselves—and as is so often true, it is the landscape that assists them on this journey.



The house when Patti was a child . . .



and present day.

the bookshop at water's end

Questions for Discussion

1 The river is a prominent presence in *The Bookshop at Water's End*. What does it mean to you and what does it represent? To the characters?

2 Bonny has wanted to be a doctor all her life. Is there a job or purpose you've been called to in your life? A profession you wish you'd started? (And if so, why not now?) Are we "called" to certain vocations? Is there anything you were "meant to do"?

3 When Bonny's career is on the line, her identity collapses and she must find a new way to move through life. Is this a hazard of identifying so strongly with one's career? Has this happened to you or someone you love?

4 Lainey is an artist and she expresses herself in the world this way. Does art help us express our internal world or is it just another career? Does Lainey's art help her find her way to a better way of living with her husband and children? To reconciling the loss of her mother?

5 Both Lainey and Owen have lived without their mother since childhood, not knowing if she is dead or alive. Lainey has been obsessed with finding her, sometimes to the detriment of her husband and children. Would you continue to look for her or accept this loss? How far do we go to find those we love or bring them back into the fold of the family? How did living without a mother affect Lainey and her relationships and choices? How did living without a mother affect Owen and his relationships and choices?

6 Female relationships populate this novel—mother/daughter; best friends; mentor/teen. How do these relationships shape and change each character? Do you have a Bonny or a Mimi in your life? How has that affected you?

7 Bonny has been in love with Owen for as long as she can remember. Is this "real" love or a pining for the past? Can she ever have a lasting relationship with him?

8 Lainey and Bonny have been best friends since they were eleven years old and yet Bonny kept her deepest thoughts about Owen to herself. Is this a betrayal of their friendship? Should she have told Lainey how she really felt all along? Have you had a friendship so long-lasting and grounded in childhood?

9 When Piper loses George, each character blames herself in a different way: Piper for looking away; Lainey for being obsessed with finding her mother; and Bonny for distracting everyone when Owen appeared. When you read that scene, did you blame anyone? Did you find yourself blaming one of the women more than another? Why?

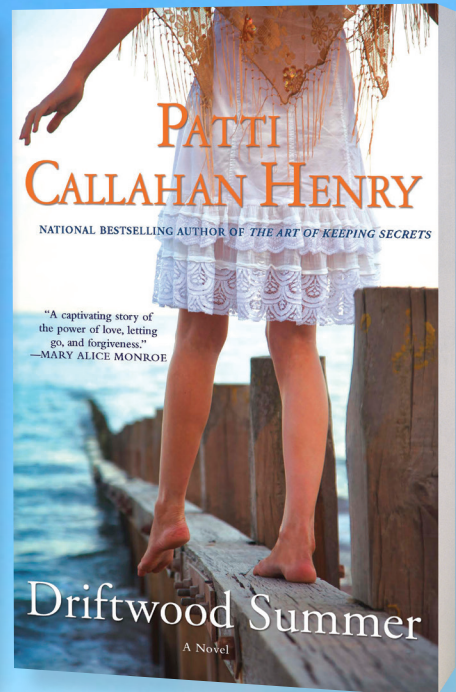
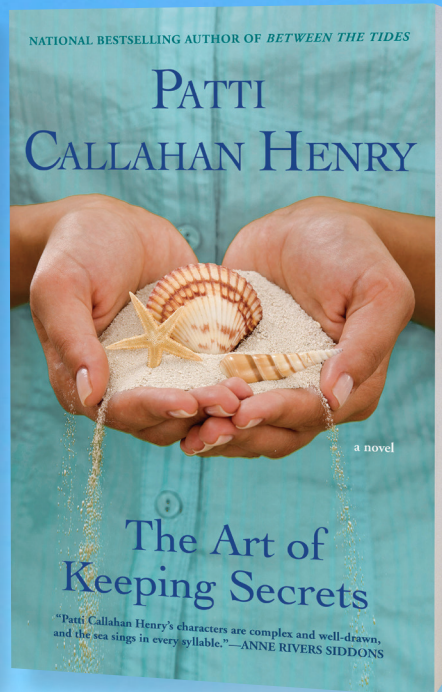
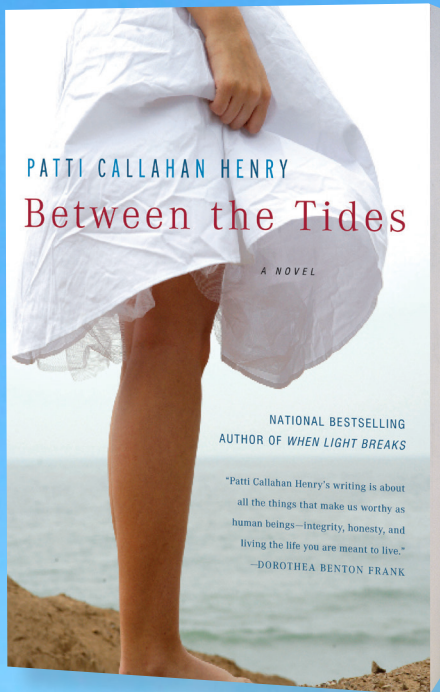
10 Mimi the bookseller visits this novel from *The Idea of Love*. She has affected these women's lives for generations with her bookstore and with her book suggestions. Do books and bookstores have the capability to change us and/or our lives? Is there a book that has changed you? Your life? A bookstore that feels like "home" to you?

11 Home. All of these characters are trying to identify and find "home." Is this a place? A house? A group of people? A feeling? A town?

12 One of the very last lines is about Lainey's mother—"We all do the very best we can." Do you think she did the best she could? Is this true in your life or with those you love?

13 Mimi believes that the river brings "what it will," and as the novel ends, she waits for what it will bring next. Is nature an omen? Does it hint at what comes next?

MORE FROM PATTI CALLAHAN HENRY



PATTI CALLAHAN HENRY is a *New York Times* bestselling author whose novels include *The Idea of Love*, *The Stories We Tell*, *And Then I Found You*, *Coming Up for Air*, *The Perfect Love Song*, *Driftwood Summer*, *The Art of Keeping Secrets*, *Between the Tides*, *When Light Breaks*, *Where the River Runs* and *Losing the Moon*. Short-listed for the Townsend Prize for Fiction, and nominated multiple times for the Southern Independent Booksellers Alliance (SIBA) Book Award for Fiction, Patti is a frequent speaker at luncheons, book clubs and women's groups.

patticallahanhenry.com  /AuthorPattiCallahanHenry  @pcalhenry

