

By JIM LUKSIC

The Progress

It was New Year's Day when Mesquite resident Carol Arnim posted on social media about forming a local writers group.

It didn't take long for like-minded Summer Wilson to notice the request and reply to Arnim.

"That was the opportunity, the call I had to answer," Wilson said.

The pair remained in touch, promptly organizing Chapter One: Virgin Valley Fellowship of Writers (VFW), whose maiden meeting was in early January. Arnim's main interest in writing was particularly personal: Her great-uncle Hans-Jurgen von Arnim served as a German general under Adolf Hitler during World War II.

"I felt that I had to write a book about the 'average' person who lived in Europe at that time," said Arnim, whose heritage is German, Swiss, and Irish. Her literary agent, however, discouraged Arnim from using the pronoun I, because "most autobiographies don't sell very well."

That feedback didn't deter the VFW vice president from writing a different novel about another real-life person: Her good friend Pam Nelson, who died of cancer a decade ago.

"There's no story more compelling" is how Arnim described the project about Nelson, who moved from England to New York City, opened hair salons, then dated a "psychopath" with whom she bought a hotel.

"It's based on general biographical facts," Arnim said of the book titled *Pray Like Shakespeare*, which she continues to revise.

Wilson, the writing group's president and secretary, explained that she admires Arnim's grit and ambitious drive. "I hope she finishes the novel soon," she said.

The daughter of Florida-based screenwriter Terri Emerson – who founded Screenwriters of Tomorrow – Wilson is penning movie scripts and short stories. She also attends each VFW meeting, which occur every other Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday.

"I'm looking to inspire other women who have been through trauma," she said. "We are taking personal pain and turning it into something positive."

The same goes for Arnim, who has called Mesquite home since 2002. Born and raised in Texas, she moved to San Jose, Calif., initially to study architecture. Soon thereafter, she "fell into the tech industry" and was ultimately promoted to director of marketing.



Carol Arnim

Eventually, 750 miles east as the crow flies is where Arnim and her then-husband hunkered down in Salt Lake City, as she enrolled as an English major at the University of Utah. The couple launched businesses but, upon getting divorced, ultimately sold those.

As is the case with most people who relocate to the Virgin Valley, Arnim took an instant liking to it. “I feel there’s a spiritual energy, a healing place,” she explained.

Before initiating the new writers’ fellowship, she worked with Maves Construction from 2019 to 2022 whereupon her architectural skills emerged – along with the pandemic. Arnim was offered a partnership, before the cost of building materials and pricing escalated, prompting her to pursue a different opportunity.

When Arnim isn’t busy fine-tuning Pray Like Shakespeare, her hobbies include hiking with her boyfriend Dan and dog Penny (a Sheltie), playing golf and – having taken a cooking course in Italy – making Italian cuisine.

Last but not most: Arnim cherishes a beloved stepdaughter – whom she “loved at first sight” – in California.

For now, Arnim and Wilson are focused on Chapter One: Virgin Valley Fellowship of Writers.

“I hope the number of members will grow, but I also like its intimacy,” said Arnim. “The group meetings are therapeutic.”

According to Wilson, they’re trying to compile an anthology of short stories and poetry essays, for which the group needs more volunteers. In any case, she is grateful to have Arnim on board.

“Carol keeps me motivated, and I love that she’s so down to earth,” Wilson said. “After our first meeting, I gave her a big hug.”