

# Dare to Dream. Dare to Discover. Dare to Do.

## Dare to Dream. Dare to Discover. Dare to Do.

by Susan Marquez

Those are words Richelle Putnam lives by. Readers of *The Bluegrass Standard* magazine may recognize Richelle from her bylines on many of the articles published in the magazine. In addition to writing for *The Bluegrass Standard*, she serves as its managing editor, a position she has held since Volume 1, Issue 1 was published in 2017.

The path to being managing editor for a magazine that is read across the United States and in other countries around the world has not been a straight one. Born in Flint, Michigan, Richelle was reared in the Deep South, in both Jackson and Meridian, Mississippi. In her early 20s, she began writing short stories and poetry.

“I’ve always loved reading and hearing good stories. I think that’s where my interest in writing began. I submitted a few of my stories to contests early on but never heard back, so I kind of gave up on it.” But writing was still something deep within her soul.

During that time, many of Richelle’s friends got together to play guitars and sing on the weekends, so Richelle got her first guitar and tried to keep up.

*“I thought it would be fun to put some of my poetry to music, and that is what kicked off my love of songwriting.”*



The Magnatones (L/R – Lamar McKenzie, Joey Ethridge, Richelle Putnam, Philip Whaley, Leon Williams)

She joined a band, The Magnatones, and they practiced in one of the member's in-house recording studio. "My first original song was the first original to be recorded in the studio," she recalls. "Everyone in the band was incredibly supportive and helpful. That was back when recordings were made on reel-to-reel tapes, and I would lay down the vocals and guitar, then they'd go in and lay down the lead instrument tracks, guitar, drums, and keyboard. I knew then that's what I wanted to pursue."

As much as Richelle loved music, she set it aside when other life matters took precedence. "I gave up everything after my divorce, when I became a single mother with three children. I worked two jobs and my main concern was providing for my children."

When she married her husband, Tim, in 1991, she adopted his

precious toddler girl, and they started their blended family. Years later, when the kids were all in school, Richelle mentioned she would like to get another guitar. At that time, Tim had never heard Richelle sing or play the guitar.

*“He bought me an Alvarez guitar, exactly like the one I had. I played around with it, singing little songs for the children.”*

That got Richelle interested in writing for children, which began her lifelong learning. “I took three Institute of Children’s Literature courses, then took a few more courses on writing for children and decided to join the Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators. I went to conferences and met other writers.” Many of her children’s stories were published in magazines for children.

Richelle veered into other types of writing and entered them in writing contests. She researched to find the best contests and carefully followed the submission guidelines. “Writing for contests was a good thing for me, because it made me write, and it made me meet a deadline.”

Richelle entered the *Writer’s Digest* annual article competition. An article she had written and published was a top ten finalist in the Article/Essay category, out of thousands of submissions. “That gave me stars I could share, and the confidence I needed to keep writing. It was an affirmation that I was going in the right direction.”

She entered the *Writer’s Digest* popular fiction contest and won third place. “I was so excited to see my name in that magazine!”

Her confidence bolstered, Richelle began entering some of her lyrics into the *American Songwriter* magazine lyric writing contest. “It was a very reputable and well-known magazine, so I knew it would mean something to do well in their

competitions.” And she did do well, placing in five of the magazine’s songwriting contests, with one receiving second-place and her lyrics being published in the magazine.

*“That let me know I was certainly going in the right direction with my songwriting,” she says.*

What Richelle has learned from writing articles, fiction, and songs is that it’s all about the story. “People love a story, and when you tell a good one, people listen.”



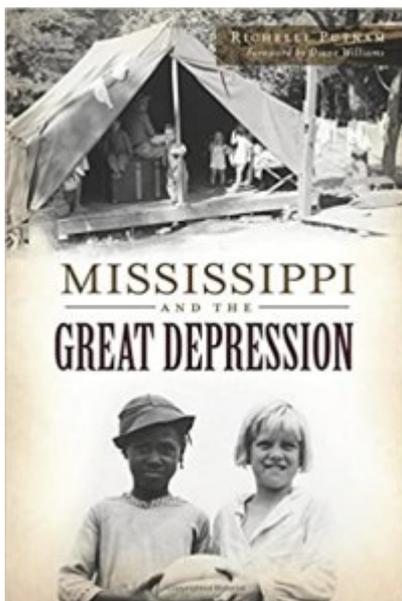
Interviewing Archie Manning (Photo: Greg Campbell)

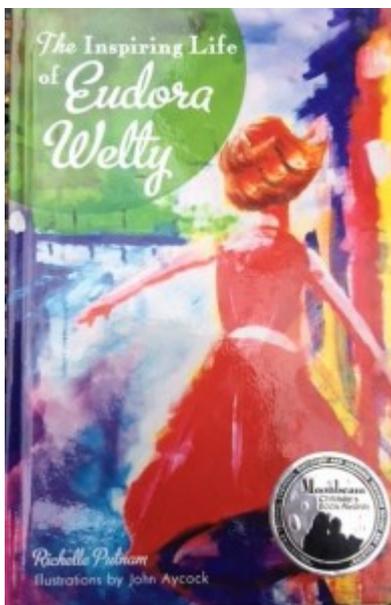
Little did Richelle know that her writing and love of music would come together in an unexpected way when she met Keith Barnacastle. Keith was kicking around the idea of starting an online magazine to celebrate all things Bluegrass, something for which he has a deep-rooted passion. Invited to a meeting with a few other potential independent contractors, Richelle listened to Keith’s vision for the magazine. “The more we talked, I was seeing how different entities were connected

through the music, such as venues, restaurants that support music, towns that support music festivals, and so many others in the music industry. And the more Keith realized the need for an editor.”

Richelle loves to dig down and find the story behind the story.

*“The story is really bigger than just the music. It’s the instruments and the people who make the instruments. It’s the spouses behind the musicians. The songwriters and the producers. The recording studios and the record labels. That’s what we love to highlight in The Bluegrass Standard. We have grown from the original mission into something much bigger.”*





No stranger to writing for magazines, Richelle has been a regular contributor to several magazines for years, as well as owning and publishing her own *Southern Roots* magazine. Many of

her stories, both fiction and non-fiction, have been published in anthologies. She is a silver medal recipient of the 2014 Moonbeam Children's Book Award for her MG/YA biography, *The Inspiring Life of Eudora Welty*, and a bronze medal recipient of the 2017 Foreword INDIES Book Awards, Regional Category for her book *Mississippi and the Great Depression*.

Her unpublished historical novel set in the 800's is based on the life of King Alfred. "I've always loved Robin Hood, movies based in medieval times, and castles," Richelle says. "My favorite movie is *The Man in the Iron Mask*." Richelle has researched, written, and rewritten this novel, *Sons of Segbert, Brothers of Wessex*, for over 15 years. Soon, one of her greatest dreams will come true, thanks to being awarded one of the coveted literary fellowships by the Mississippi Arts Commission, which she also received in 2014 for another project.



With Author/Storyteller/Artist Diane Williams



With Tina Wood

She will travel to the old Wessex (West) country of England to walk and explore the same path King Alfred traversed over 1200 years ago. This opportunity, Richelle believes, will bring history to life in a distinct way and make her novel even more historically correct and richer.

That, once again, shows Richelle's commitment to the story, the same commitment she brings each month to readers of The Bluegrass Standard.

"Besides (the Bluegrass Standard) getting bigger and better, we see it as an evolution. Bluegrass has done much beyond the

traditional. It's a genre that can no longer be put in a box," she says.

And just like Bluegrass, Richelle Putnam can't be put in a box. A lifelong learner, she takes classes on one subject or another year after year, and, if all goes as planned, she will complete her Bachelor of Science in Marketing Management by the end of 2021.

"It's a degree that is very much connected to my writing. I will be able to help other artists to market themselves and to fulfill their goals. It's using today's technology to solve problems and not basing everything on how we have always done things."

Learning is something that energizes Richelle, and she will use that new knowledge to continue telling the stories that are so precious to her, as she dares to dream, to discover, and to do something great in the world.



For more information on Richelle Putnam, visit her website at [www.richelleputnam.net](http://www.richelleputnam.net).

The Mississippi Arts Commission, a state agency, serves the residents of the state by providing grants that support

programs to enhance communities; assist artists and arts organizations; promote the arts in education and celebrate Mississippi's cultural heritage. Established in 1968, the Mississippi Arts Commission is funded by the Mississippi Legislature, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Mississippi Endowment for the Arts at the Community Foundation for Mississippi and other private sources. The agency serves as an active supporter and promoter of arts in community life and arts education.

For information from the Mississippi Arts Commission, contact Anna Ehr Gott, Communications Director, 601-359-6546 or [aehrgott@arts.ms.gov](mailto:aehrgott@arts.ms.gov).



“Artists have been hit particularly hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, and as such, we are truly grateful to be able to provide grants to talented individuals across the state,” said Malcolm White, who was executive director of MAC at the time of the award. “These artists infuse their communities with the creative spirit and inspiration we need during these times, and we are proud to support their efforts.”