

WRANGLER

Living MV

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PAGE-TURNING
ADVENTURES with the SORENSONS

March is National Reading Month and the perfect time to shine the spotlight on local author Margo Sorenson. Margo and her husband, Jim, have lived in Rancho Mission Viejo in the Avocet neighborhood in Gavilan since 2016. But their story began to unfold long before that.

The couple, who celebrated their 54th wedding anniversary in February, met in Westwood where Margo was wrapping up a BA in medieval history at UCLA. Jim, a California native, graduated from UCSB with a BA in economics and earned his MS in quantitative methods from USC, which put him in the Los Angeles area at the same time as Margo. After a whirlwind courtship, they tied the knot just six short months after meeting. Jim smiles, shrugs, and shares, "What can I say? I was smitten."

The Sorensons love to travel and have lived different chapters of their lives in various parts of the country—and the world. Margo spent her young childhood in Spain and Italy, and Italy remains a favorite travel destination for the husband and wife duo. One of her most recent books, her first crossover adult/young adult novel, *Secrets in Translation*, is set in the cliffside village of Positano on the Amalfi coast. Margo notes, "Our Italian friends were a big help with the research for that one!"

The majority of Margo's books are geared toward kids ages 3-8 and middle-school readers. In fact, she's penned more than 30 books to date! Margo drew a lot of inspiration for her characters, settings, and themes from the decade she and Jim spent living in Hawaii and says she loves giving young children the chance to live vicariously through her characters' experiences in her books.

Margo fully embraces the "aloha" lifestyle and cherishes the Hawaiian name given to her by a dear family friend. *Leipua'ala*, which means "lasting gifts for children," is the perfect moniker for our resident author. She shares, "Our family friend presented his explanation of the name as follows: 'The *lei* represents the books you create which are

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By Ryann Smith Groseclose / Photos by Russell H. Davidson

The Sorenson's latest chapter is unfolding on the Ranch.

gifts for the younger generation. The *pua* are all the children to whom you dedicate your work. And the fragrance or *'ala* is the lasting imagery from your books the children will take with them into adulthood." A beautiful name and sentiment, indeed.

Over the years, when Margo wasn't writing, she focused on her career as a teacher. She says, "I taught middle school and high school for a total of 17 years at Canyon High School (Canyon Country, CA), University High

School (Irvine, CA), Harbor Day School (Corona del Mar, CA), and at Punahou School (Honolulu, HI.) When Jim took a job in Minnesota, I was able to retire early and write full time."

Minnesota was home to the Sorensons for 10 years. They laughingly recall needing to use both first and last names while making dinner reservations. Sorenson is quite a popular surname in that part of the country. There were actually seven pages of "Sorensons" in the Minneapolis phone book while they lived there!

In the early days of their marriage, they joke that Jim was a "sports nut" and Margo a "sports no." To keep her entertained during those long, double-header baseball games, Jim taught Margo to keep score. When they had children, Jim coached their two daughters in Little League and softball, and Margo became the regular scorekeeper, a task that helped her have fun, get involved, and stay engaged.

She ended up falling in love with sports—baseball in particular—and now the couple's favorite teams are the Angels and Dodgers. The Sorensons are such big fans, they even attend spring training camps in Arizona whenever possible. Margo says, "I love the intricacies of the game's strategies and the personalities involved. A number of my middle-grade novels feature characters who play baseball, soccer, football, or golf. And in my newest picture book, *Calvin Gets the Last Word*, Calvin plays baseball."

Though the Sorenson's daughters are now grown with families of their own, the four grandchildren, whom Margo and Jim have dubbed "The Adorables," love their California visits from Maryland and Arizona. Jim shares, "Our Adorables enjoy our community amenities like the climbing structures, the zip line, and the pools (not the 'grandma and grandpa' pools, they say, but the 'kid pools')." He continues, "Seeing the joy on their faces warms our hearts." Margo chimes in, "Attending the Adorables' activities and seeing pictures of their triumphs brings back memories of coaching our own daughters in sports and other activities for years; it's a fun legacy."



Practicing a little putting in the backyard.

Margo's continued career as an author keeps her very busy. When she's not working on her latest book, Margo loves visiting local schools, reading to the children and sharing her stories with a new generation of kids. She gets a kick out of the questions they ask, which can be as random as, "What's your favorite snack to eat while you're writing?" Though COVID has put a damper on these assemblies this past year, everyone has adapted by doing Zoom meetings in the interim. She looks forward to sharing her talents with local children in person again, soon. (For information on having Margo visit a school near you or to learn more about her and her books, visit margosorenson.com.)

The Sorensons love their RMV neighbors and reflect, "We are blessed to live in such a wonderful neighborhood and community. Our neighbors are considerate, engaging, and lots of fun." Margo especially appreciates the love and support she's received in regard to her books. She says, "It's been great to meet friends and young families in the community who ask me to sign books for them, as 'porchside pick-ups,' as gifts for young readers, or to sign bookplates that get mailed to them to put in their books. We wave and smile at each other through the office window, because of social distancing!" Pre-pandemic, a number of local women's books clubs chose Sorenson's *Secrets in Translation* to discuss and invited her to special Italian lunches and dinners as a result. The couple is beyond grateful to live in such a supportive community.

As their latest chapter here on the Ranch unfolds, one thing is certain: Margo and Jim have lived a beautiful life together and their story is far from over.