



PHOTO: Author Michèle Olson brings the magic of Mackinac Island to life in her captivating novels filled with mystery, romance, and faith.

## Unveiling Mackinac Mysteries

# MICHÈLE OLSON

## Crafting Diverse Characters and Captivating Stories

BY DAN PETERS

*Michèle Olson discusses her Mackinac Island Stories series, blending mystery, romance, and faith, crafting diverse characters against the backdrop of this unique locale.*

**M**ichèle Olson's creative journey spans over four decades, encompassing advertising, marketing, broadcasting, and now, fiction writing. With a professional voice career that includes DJing during the era of records, Michèle has ventured into the realm of storytelling with her Mackinac Island Stories series. Inspired by her love for the enchanting *Mackinac Island in Michigan*, Michèle brings to life tales of mystery, romance, friendship, and faith against the backdrop of this unique locale.

The allure of *Mackinac Island*, with its prohibition on cars and reliance on horses and bikes for transportation, serves as more than just a picturesque setting. It becomes a character in itself, influencing the narrative and shaping the lives of Michèle's protagonists. For Michèle, the island holds a special place in her heart, having frequented it for over 40 years. Through her novels, she invites readers to experience the island's beauty and

charm, even when they can't be there in person.

In each installment of her series, Michèle introduces readers to a new protagonist facing their own set of challenges and mysteries. From the vibrant Piper Penn to the titular characters like Ethel, Dorothy, Alice, Wendy, and Nancy, Michèle crafts diverse characters spanning different professions, personalities, and ages. Through their journeys, readers encounter themes of mystery, mayhem, mirth, and miracles, finding pieces of themselves mirrored in these fictional lives.

What sets Michèle's novels apart is the seamless integration of diverse genres—mystery, romance, and faith. Striking a balance between these elements while maintaining a cohesive narrative poses its challenges, but Michèle navigates them skillfully. Her stories explore faith not as a separate entity, but as an integral part of her characters' lives, guiding them through difficult decisions and life choices.

Beyond writing, Michèle's other creative pursuits—broadcasting, voice work, and sketchdoodling—influence her approach to storytelling. These diverse mediums converge under her creative imprint, Lake Girl Publishing, blurring the lines between imagination and reality. Drawing from her own experiences and interests, Michèle infuses authenticity into her characters and settings, ensuring they resonate with readers on a personal level.

At the heart of Michèle's storytelling lies a message of self-acceptance and embracing one's true self in a world that often overlooks individuals. Through her narratives, she reminds readers of their inherent worth and uniqueness, echoing the message of love and acceptance found in timeless stories and parables. Ultimately, Michèle's hope is that her readers, amidst laughter, tears, and wonder, find themselves reflected in the pages of her novels, embracing their own stories with newfound acceptance and joy.



Step into the world of Michèle Olson's Mackinac Island Stories series, where mysteries unfold against the backdrop of this enchanting locale.

**Your Mackinac Island Stories series explores themes of mystery, romance, friendship, and faith against the backdrop of Mackinac Island. What inspired you to set your stories in this particular location, and how does the island itself influence the narrative and characters?**

Mackinac Island is a very unique, real place located where the upper peninsula and lower peninsula of the state of Michigan meet. To this day, there are no cars allowed. The transportation is horses and bikes. It is where Lake Michigan and Lake Huron meet, in a body of water called the Straits of Mackinac. The shops, houses, and the famous Grand Hotel, along with the lush seasonal environment truly makes it a place that is Somewhere in Time. (The name of the movie shot there in 1979 with Christopher Reeve and Jane Seymour). My husband and I live about five hours away in Wisconsin, and we've been going to the island for over 40 years. That made it the perfect place to set my stories. Although there are year-round residents, the population swells in spring, summer, and fall when a million people go to see the beauty of the area. As a mystery writer, it makes it a perfect place for people to hide and go incognito! I love it very much, so writing my novels set there lets me feel like I'm at the Grand Hotel and the island. Readers tell me they feel the same. It's a way to be there when they can't be there in person.

**Each installment in your series follows a different protagonist facing unique challenges and mysteries. How do you approach crafting these diverse characters, and what do you hope readers take away from their individual journeys?**

While the books can be read as "stand alones" you can read them in order. *Being Ethel* (In a world that loves Lucy) starts in 1979. *Being Dorothy* (In a world longing for home) is 1980. *Being Alice* (In a world lost in the looking glass) is 1981. *Being Wendy* (In a world afraid to grow up) is 1982. And the latest, *Being Nancy* (In a world lost in mystery) is 1983. As a mystery writer, I didn't want the crimes and mysteries to be solvable with a cell phone! I like the era when we still had to go to a phone booth or send a telegram.

We meet Piper Penn in *Being Ethel* and understand her story. She continues on in every story but becomes someone that the protagonist in each of the other stories, meets. The new character become the focus. They are all very unique in their professions, personalities, and ages. The main characters run from ages 20's to 70s. They all encounter mystery, mayhem, mirth, and miracles. What I hope a reader takes away is seeing themselves in some aspect of each character's journey. I do have consistent side characters and a villain who shows up in each book...readers love that

**Being Ethel, Being Dorothy, Being Alice, Being Wendy and now Being Nancy each feature strong female protagonists navigating complex situations. What inspired you to focus on these women's stories, and how do you ensure their experiences resonate with readers?**

People love the titles, and it's an instant connection for the reader. Ethel and Lucy, Dorothy resonates with Wizard of Oz, Alice – Alice in Wonderland, Wendy-Peter Pan, and Nancy-Nancy Drew...they all lay the groundwork to explore the personality of the people coming to Mackinac Island, plus interweaving aspects of those stories that affect

the female protagonist's lives. The latest *Being Nancy* book is for all those people who grew up reading Nancy Drew...so many of us! The lessons of the girl sleuth are woven into a Nancy Drew convention at the Grand Hotel in 1983.

**Your novels blend elements of mystery, romance, and faith. How do you strike a balance between these genres while maintaining a cohesive narrative, and what challenges do you encounter in weaving together these different themes?**

I find faith to be extremely important when it comes to life choices. That's what these ladies are facing through the stories – lots of life choices. I do get feedback from people who weren't looking for a story of faith woven into the mystery and mayhem. The feedback has been mostly positive. They get to see hard life questions play out in the lives of these characters. Sometimes, the questions are ones the readers have wondered about themselves. I think the stories are also interesting to someone who doesn't have a strong faith life, too. It's simply what happens to these characters and what they observe in the lives of those who have found peace in trying circumstances. It's their story, just as anyone reconciles life difficulties in their journey. Whether or not the reader finds it applies to their life is optional. But it's always food for thought.

The character of Sister Mary-Margaret in *Being Ethel* is beloved by readers. She is a fan favorite- I've received lots of feedback and love for that character.

**In addition to writing, you're also a broadcaster, voice pro, and sketchdoodler. How do these diverse creative pursuits inform your approach to stor-**

**ytelling, and do you find that they influence each other in unexpected ways?**

They all fall under my creative imprint: Lake Girl Publishing. The lines blur – my voice work helps me "hear" the characters, sketchdoodling is a help in seeing where the story goes. I do the art for all the postcards on the covers. In future stories, I'll be delving into my radio/TV background in the 70s, because that's a world I know. All the characters professions: artists, author, collector, musician, and Nancy Drew lover...are things I know and love. Except maybe the spy theme of *Being Dorothy*...I've never been a spy. Or have I? :)

**Your message involves the importance of being seen, valued, and unique in a world that often overlooks individuals. How do you weave this message into your storytelling, and what do you hope readers take away from your books in terms of self-acceptance and embracing their true selves?**

If you read the Bible, you will see parables and stories were an intricate part of teaching people how to love, share, and put others before themselves. We also see how God loves each of us, flaws and all, and would leave the 99 sheep to go after the one who is lost. That's an important message for each of us. We are loved, cared for, adored, and there is a plan for each of us to live an abundant life. I hope that comes through in every story. That's a pretty important message to embrace, the truth that goes beyond the fiction to the heart. Along the way we laugh, we cry, we wonder, and we learn. The ultimate story is when the reader puts their name after "Being".