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This interview took place because we'd just read Maralys Wills' 10<sup>th</sup> book, *A Circus without Elephants*.



## Maralys Wills serves up more than a delicious sundae...

By Beryl Hall Bray

Have you ever read a great book and wished you could sit down and visit with the author? WOW! got to do just that! We would love for you to join us as we review our engrossing conversation over a luncheon with *Maralys Wills*.

We met at a Wills' family favorite restaurant and Maralys knew where to find the perfect secluded table. We all agreed that we could talk and eat at the same time. So, we quickly started discussing one of her books very close to her heart, *Save My Son*, that she wrote with Sheriff Mike Carona. It openly discusses the trials of the Wills family dealing with a son severely addicted to alcohol and cocaine.

Then Maralys shared how her writing started, "I started out writing the book that became my sort-of signature book, *Higher than Eagles*. It was about our family and the hang gliding years."

“But that one took fourteen years from the time that I first wrote it till it sold. And that was longer than I ever wanted to spend.”

We laughed as WOW! asked, “So, that was your first book?”

MARALYS: “No. I started writing really seriously in the sixties, seriously but sporadically.” She laughed, “I had a house full of kids, six kids by then. So, writing was just something that I had to fit in, if I could. I would jump in my car at times, go up the hill, and sit there with my typewriter on my lap.

“And, I was reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*, using that as my model for good writing. I still feel it is the best example of good writing in the world. I was studying it, trying to figure out her technique. Asking, how did she do this, how did she create scenes, what were the details that went into this? It’s very hard to study it though, because you get swept away by the story.”

WOW!: “That’s one of the questions I meant to ask you...”

MARALYS: “How to study good writing?” “Remember, the better it is, the harder it is to study!”

WOW!: “Right. Your writing is so smooth and it flows so well, I get wrapped up in the story, not in the writing, and I have to step back and go, wait a minute, this is well structured, well thought out...”

MARALYS grinning: “Thank you...thank you...”

WOW!: “So, how much time do you spend in the editing process—because it is so smooth?”

MARALYS: “A lot. A lot...Yeah, I used to create awkward sentences with great

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rapidity, I could do one after the other, and they flowed from my brain like water. But, I finally recognized them before they got out of the typewriter...then; I could finally see an awkward sentence coming and I would duck!”

We laughed and felt relief that awkward sentences could be so beautifully conquered with a lot of learning

and willingness to re-write relentlessly.

MARALYS: “But, this doesn’t mean that my sentences always flow perfectly from one to the other. The more uninterrupted time I have to get my brain going, the smoother the flow will be. And I just seldom get that in my life anymore.” Maralys grinned and with her hand gestured toward us, “I’m going out to lunch, it’s time to make breakfast for my husband, and there are a million things... And so, to make up for this lack of ability to concentrate, and gain fluidity, this smoothness, you really have to spend a lot of time polishing.

“I’ve got a sequel to *A Circus without Elephants* all ready, and yet I’m looking at it again and I’m not happy with all of it, and so I’m going through it, chapter by chapter, and I’m doing two things. I’m trying to improve the flow of the whole thing...the good writing...but, I’ve also tried to tie each chapter to the next, which means I’m creating bridges, transitions...because they are largely unconnected stories. This means I have to reveal a little bit more about myself...which I’m willing to do now.

“All the while, I’m keeping in mind that I meant the book to be humorous. However, life isn’t always humorous. There’s the part in the center, and I can’t just say, ‘Whoops! Lost two kids, I’m going to go on now.’ You can’t do that, so you have to acknowledge it, you have to spend some time there, but you notice that I didn’t spend as much time there as in the other books, because I couldn’t afford to.

“What happened is that I started out doing that and some friends said, ‘You just killed the whole end of the book! From the place where the kids died, there was nothing left to be funny about or laugh about. You just had me wallowing in grief and after that it stopped being funny.

“I thought that was good advice. So, I pulled back on the deaths. I admitted that the kids had died, I gave our reactions to the tragedies, but I didn’t go into those great big, long...remember the scene with Bobby?”

WOW!: Oh, yes...

MARALYS: “So, I eliminated that, tempering it a lot. And, then I had to recreate Bobby and Eric in our minds as the other chapters went, so you couldn’t say, ‘Well, she sure has forgotten about those kids!’”

WOW!: “There has to be a balance...So, how do you know which parts to keep and which to cut?”

MARALYS: “It’s very, very difficult. That’s one of the biggest choices. When I teach my novel writing course or memoirs course, I emphasize this as one of the biggest decisions a writer has to make...and, you’re constantly making them.

“Sometimes, the thing that’s worth keeping is not worth two pages but only two paragraphs. Whereas, there’s another event that’s huge and I gave it a page and it should have been five pages...you’re writing and living it out, taking the reader along with you.”

WOW!: “Learning that is powerful.”

MARALYS: “Oh, another good lesson is...Everything I learn, I have to keep relearning. I create a page and think, ‘I know better than that! How did I do that?’ This is all narrative, it’s all boring, there’s no dialogue...duh...”

We all laughed and WOW! realized that when we’re struggling to write the best that we can, we’re rubbing shoulders with the best of authors.

WOW!: “We hear you.”

MARALYS: “Another thing I learned with *Higher than Eagles* was...where is the mother in all this? I became a camera; I had just reported on the events, not putting myself into it. And I realized it isn’t interesting without me in it! I started to rewrite, and even to me, I could see it become more interesting. So, instead of merely reporting that a son had flown up against the sky and become a speck against the cloud...it became, how does the mother feel the first time he leaves the earth.”

WOW!: “Oh, I know...I loved it!”

MARALYS: “I had to learn, relearn, and then relearn again—the narrator needs to be *in* there. The reader really wants to know how the

“...And, the way you live... is the way you write...”

narrator feels. They want to know, what is she feeling, what is she thinking, what's going on in her head? It's almost more interesting than what's going on against the cloud up there."

WOW!: "Is that part of what you teach?"

MARALYS: "That's right...for about nineteen years now."

The waiter, no respecter of the higher learning going on, asks if he can get us something to drink. And, our conversation proceeded to cover another angle on what can be done when devastating events take place that could kill the humor in her upcoming book.

MARALYS: "...I thought I didn't want to go into this because this is a funny book, a sequel to *A Circus without Elephants*. Then, I thought, this gives it a little more meat. I guess what I was trying to say is that, unlike what people think, we're not a *Leave It to Beaver* family."

WOW! had to laugh, because this lady and her family would be anything but predictable.

MARALYS: "Sometimes life is unfair, sometimes the family members are unfair, sometimes you get struck by the arrows of life itself and you bleed. So, my chapter contains some of this..."

WOW!: "This is one of the things that we're so impressed with...the fact that despite different things that have happened...you've never lost seeing the levity in life...and that's what has gotten you through."

MARALYS: "It is! And, the way you live...is the way you write..."

WOW!: "That being the case, what do you hope readers will get out of *A Circus without Elephants* and the sequel?"

MARALYS: "I hope that they'll find these moments revealing but not about me, but about something that they're doing."

With this profound thought running through our brains, Maralys got up from the table. She returned with a surprise for us. We learned that she can make a terrific sundae. Of course, it began with chocolate yogurt, the right amount of caramel and granola. It couldn't top our time with such a talented and funny woman; but it was scrumptiously delicious. We wanted to give her something sweet, so I told her about an eleven-year-old fan she had.

WOW!: "...I told Miranda that I needed to have the book back briefly, so I could prepare for this interview. She brought the book but was almost teary-eyed as she said she was already on chapter fifteen. She was promised that she would get the book back. Maralys, think of the audience for your book, from her age to my tender age." I paused for the laughter.

WOW! continues, "This is what is so brilliant, face it, you get the reader to laugh and then you just slip life in there."

MARALYS: "Thanks, hey, do you think your friend would like a book of her own? I have one in the car." There was a rapid nodding of the head and huge grins on all of our faces. [She wrote a note and signed it. I captured Miranda's pretty, grateful face as she read the inscription and I emailed it to Maralys.]

MARALYS: "...I'm hoping that with the teenage stuff people will recognize their own teens. The fact that the kids sit there with a casserole and spread everything out, and say, 'I don't eat this and I don't eat this...' And, it's not a casserole anymore...it's a plate of ingredients."

WOW! and Maralys have to laugh, especially when we eyed our clean plates and knew we'd outgrown our picky-eating days.

WOW!: "Your comedic timing always comes through and is hilarious..."

MARALYS: "Oh, good!"

Now, you have to love a woman like that!

WOW!: "You really hit on life as it is..."

MARALYS: "I'm just hoping...anybody that's lived with a packrat will understand my husband. He's still, how would you say, you know, an off-the-beaten-track kind of guy. He's just unpredictable, after all these years (they've been married 56 years!), I still wonder what he's going to do today.

"For instance, it just annoyed the heck out of me, even though I knew it was a silly thing to be annoyed about, but I was going to throw away two empty egg cartons and he wants those egg cartons. I asked, 'Why?' He wanted those egg cartons so he can put them in the fireplace. I said, 'Honey, it is a hundred degrees...why are we building, why would we light a fire? I don't want to look at those egg cartons from now until November, when we can actually light a fire!' He says, 'Well, I'll burn them sometime.' And the conversation ended with the egg cartons in the fireplace."

WOW!: "I know you had said that when you have an argument he always wins."

MARALYS: "He does."

WOW!: "...And, you're like Marge Simpson when it comes to verbal besting? Doesn't that get annoying?"

MARALYS: "All the time, all the time!"

She smiles at us as we wait to discover how she can be so cheerful.

MARALYS: "But, I find ways to get my own way, you know, and if it's really important, I do get my own way. If I really didn't want those egg cartons in the fireplace, I could have made a big enough fuss and he would have gotten rid of them...but, what's the point?"

"And this brings up one of the things you do when you're a writer, and I'm sure that both of you do this, too. You live life on two levels. You live the life that you're living on a day to day basis *and* you live it up here where you're looking down on what you're doing...and you're laying out a story for the next time you write something."

WOW!: "Yeah!"

MARALYS: "And that's how you kind of live all of it when you're a writer."

WOW!: "I'm not psychotic! I'm so happy." We enjoy a good laugh as Beryl says, "Oh, I'm cured!"

MARALYS: "I'll give you a perfect example. One of my favorite playwrights is Neil Simon, I just adore him, and he describes a time when he and his wife were having this massive fight in the kitchen. He didn't say what it was about; but finally she got so exasperated that she picked up a leg of lamb and she threw it at him. And he said, 'While the lamb was flying across

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the room at me, I'm thinking, well, this would be a good scene in a play.' That's the way you live life...no matter how terrible this is, or how ridiculous or how crazy part of you is standing back and thinking, 'man, would this be a good story!'"

We had a good time envisioning Neil Simon as that leg of lamb hit the air; and were more than a little curious about whether that wasn't part of his wife's exasperation in the first place. We then move on to a subject that is of great interest to writers hoping to get published.

WOW!: "It must be hard promoting yourself..."

"Yeah, I used to be able to create awkward sentences with great rapidity, I could do one after the other, and they flowed from my brain like water. But, I finally recognized them before they got out of the typewriter...I could finally see an awkward sentence coming and I would duck!"

MARALYS: "Oh, it's so very hard. You know a publicist would probably run, and I've had one before, and they're never less than eight thousand dollars, never. Some are between eight and ten thousand dollars. In fact, I was starting to do business with one; until I realized she wanted sixteen thousand dollars. I backed away from her! So, you look at the successful books, for instance, the *Da Vinci Code*...they gave away ten thousand free books...but, they sold four to five million. So, it was worth it for them."

WOW!: "Maralys, you have a great book on your hands, I mean, when your book grabs the heart of eleven-year-olds, as well as adults, that a large audience..."

MARALYS: "Well, I'm doing my part. I'm thinking that if I keep going like this, where I've lined up speeches, from the beginning of the year through to the end, then as of right now...I'll have given seventy-seven speeches this year!"

WOW!: Wow!

MARALYS: But, it took a lot of time, hours, when I would've much rather been writing...you know, I mean, I wanted a slave *so badly!* I needed a slave!"

Maralys made it so easy to envision how desperately she wanted a slave that Wow! had to give her a suggestion.

WOW!: "If you just could've been cloned..." We were having such a good time and used the benefit of an out-of-the way booth to the max, by laughing like the teen-agers she mentioned earlier.

Maralys stopped laughing long enough to emphasize that writing an email while trying to promote a book, "you can't make it sloppy, it has to represent you as a writer...it has to be well written." Then, Maralys makes us sit up and pay more than the usual (already heightened) attention.

MARALYS: "You know that I have another book all written...I'm polishing it now, ...and I also have a writing book that's all written. Plus, I got the most stunning review from [Sydney Sheldon](#), just stunning...I gave it to him someplace and he wrote me back in three weeks and said, 'Well, I looked at this book and I realized that, there's no way in hell I can take the time to review it. I'm too busy...I'm moving out of my house, I'm writing my own memoirs, and

then he said, but in this degree, I was drawn into your book, and finally I got so far, I couldn't put it down and..."

WOW!: Wow!

MARALYS: "And then he wrote me this wonderful review and I thought...oh..."

WOW!: "We'll have to..."

MARALYS: "...put that in the interview..."

At this point, transcribing became impossible, but we'll share the best we can. There was laughter, laughter, inaudible, laughter... Maralys began looking for a copy to give us, she always has a copy...she promised to send us a copy, that you dear readers can read for yourself.

Remember, you read it on WOW! first.

Even the best of times must end; but we can't wind things up without giving you this vital information:

Maralys' email: [maralys@cox.net](mailto:maralys@cox.net) and her Website: [www.maralys.com](http://www.maralys.com). We would also love it if you would send an email to us before you leave WOW! about your thoughts on this article and anything else you've seen.

And, here is our closing question:

WOW!: "Maralys, how would you describe *[A Circus without Elephants?](#)*"

MARALYS: "The spirit of the Wright Brothers meets Erma Bombeck."

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