

THE RECORD-JOURNAL

MERIDEN, CT

----By Barbara Parent

Writer Cathie Pelletier has psyched me up for summer in Aroostook County with, “The One-Way Bridge” released earlier this month. In her eagerly awaited novel after six years, Pelletier brings her readers back to fictitious Mattagash (or is it really Allagash?) the last stop before the Allagash Wilderness in Northern Maine.

Pelletier, author of nine other novels, was born and reared on the banks of the St. John River in Allagash, Maine. She spent many years living in Nashville, Toronto and Quebec , until returning recently to the Allagash family homestead.

The setting for “The One-Way Bridge” is one week in 2006 in Mattagash. The mention of surrounding towns such as St. Leonard and Caribou, as with her earlier books that take place in Mattagash, will ring familiar with readers. Pelletier’s right-on description of the hundreds of stars aglow in the free-of-light pollution black Maine sky, puts them there. But it is the residents of Mattagash complete with their distinct and quirky personalities that Pelletier delves into with uncanny wit and poignancy.

“The natives are different in Allagash,” I recall a Cross Lake neighbor and native of Fort Kent, Maine, one of the last town’s before Allagash and referred to in Pelletier’s novels, as “Watertown,”telling me years ago when I mentioned going to Allagash to see what it was like.

It’s been nearly 10 years since Ron and I took a motorcycle ride on the one road into Allagash, turned around at the gate to the Allagash Wilderness, and rode the same road out. We traveled over the bridge spanning the Allagash River and stopped for a cup of coffee at the roadside café stuffed wildlife scattered around the room and mounted on the pine walls.

So once again Pelletier has sparked my interest in her hometown, although truth be told I fell in love with “Mattagash” many years ago after reading her previous novels

centering on the habits, history and characters, all somehow linked one way or another “relatively” speaking.

Wit, charm, description and often sadness fill the pages of Pelletier’s novels and her latest is no exception. I had read her previous nine novels prior to her appearance as one of the participants in a three-day Maine Writer’s Conference held in Camden, Maine in 2006. Meeting and talking to Pelletier and being photographed with her was the highlight of the event for me.

Since we started vacationing in northern Maine, Ron and I have met a lot of people who live in Connecticut that grew up and still have family and close ties to the towns surrounding the area Pelletier writes about.

“The One-Way Bridge” is a must read for those with roots in northern Maine and just as much so for those who may never have been north of Bangor. Readers will cozy up to the lives and interactions of the residents. Pelletier tells their stories with laugh out loud humor tinged with sadness. She skillfully brings the reader into her characters’ often oddball actions and their innermost thoughts with the understanding and compassion of a writer who knows her subjects well. Especially compelling is Pelletier’s “Author’s Note” and what led her to write this book.

This summer Ron and I hope to take another ride down the one road into Allagash and the same road. After reading “The One-Way Bridge” and the feeling like I know the Mattagashers, I’ll be on the lookout for the houses of the book’s characters such as Orville and Meg Craft, Mama Sal and Edna and Roderick and their mischievous twin sons. Could be I might spot Billy Thunder’s camper or see him speed by driving his vintage white Mustang convertible, his dog, Bullet in the passenger seat beside him.

Bank Square Books, 53 W. Main St., Mystic, May 18, 1-2:30 p.m. Author luncheon with Cathie Pelletier, \$25 includes a catered lunch, first edition hard cover of The One-Way Bridge, discussion with the author. www.banksquarebooks.com to register.

R.J. Julia Booksellers, 768 Boston Post Rd, Madison, May 18, 7 p.m., free meet the author and book discussion with Cathie Pelletier. www.rjjulia.com to register.