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## Colleyville woman's perseverance pays off with getting book published

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COLLEYVILLE — Kathy Rodgers spent 13 years as an Air Force wife.

Then she spent the next 16 years trying to write that story — of love, duty, worry and grief — and find a publisher who would take a chance on a complete unknown with a piece of fiction set during the first Gulf War.

That day came a few weeks ago when she held her book — and a small advance — in her hand. "I finally felt validated!" she said, slapping her leg for emphasis. "I kept the dream for that long because I felt I had a unique story to tell. I wanted to give a voice to all the wives and families left behind."

Rodgers, 50, might never have gotten anywhere with *The Final Salute*, except for a small, startup publisher in California founded and owned by a retired Marine Corps fighter pilot.

A generation ago, military books, whether fiction or nonfiction, were the almost exclusive domain of men. But in recent years, more women — both military members and wives of servicemen — have begun to add their voices to the stories of war.

"As a publisher of military books, I know there's a pretty limited audience out there," said Neil Levin, a retired lieutenant colonel who started Leatherneck Publishing in 2006. "I really wanted to do something that targeted women and military wives. And I related a lot personally to what she was talking about. She's got the fighter-pilot lingo down."

An occasional freelance writer, Rodgers initiated this quest in 1992, the first week they moved into their house in Colleyville. Her husband, Tom, had retired as a lieutenant colonel who flew F-111 Aardvarks and A-10 Warthogs and had just joined American Airlines out of Dallas/Fort Worth Airport.

Free from the ever-present fear of her husband dying in a military plane crash, she thought the book would be both an exorcism and a way for other people to glimpse into the lives of pilots' families. "Tom has lost so many friends in peacetime crashes," she said.

She can name them still. The main character of the book carries the last name of Capt. Roy Westerfield, who was a particularly close friend who died in a midair collision in 1980.

"I started living in fear that every time I left the house, I would come home and find a staff car sitting in front," she said. "I became consumed by fear. Nobody talked about it either. Guys would get killed, and everyone would go to the memorial service, and then hush, hush."

"When Tom retired, I still hadn't conquered those ghosts."

For a brief time, Rodgers had a book agent, but for the most part she pushed her manuscript on her own. That alone almost eliminates the chance of a major publishing house.

She asked for the help of friends and sought the advice of writing professors at Tarrant County College and Southern Methodist University. She revised and revised again. She would not self-publish, though.

"I thought this was the one, somehow, some way," she said. "I held out."

But because Leatherneck is a small publishing house, so far her book is available only on its Website <http://www.leatherneckpublishing.com> and at the book-signings she has arranged. (They're working on getting it to Amazon.com soon.)

Satisfied that she is now a novelist, she has discovered that's not quite enough.

"I'd love to make money," she said. "Now that I have the book, I want it to sell."