

# The KVNO News Interview

By [Lindsey Peterson, KVNO News](#)

October 1st, 2012

Omaha, NE- Sunday kicked off Banned Books Week and KVNO News sat down with one local author whose own work has been the target of censorship.

Lindsey Peterson: “I’m in the studio with author [Marilyn Coffey](#), who is scheduled to be a panelist on along with other writers on a discussion about censored books as part of Banned Books Week. Coffey herself is the author of *Marcella* which has faced its own controversy. Thank you for joining me, Marilyn.”

Marilyn Coffey: “You’re welcome.”

LP: “So first off, what’s the significance of banning books in the United States and the repercussions?”

MC: “Banning books is a very old activity it’s gone on for a very long time. It’s done a lot by schools and a surprising amount by libraries and other organizations too. And I think in a larger way there’s a cooling effect on reading in any way. So I think it would be better for us all if we didn’t ban books but took them or discarded them individually as we wish.”

LP: “What are the challenges for an author like yourself of a book that’s faced really tough criticism and censorship?”



*Author Marilyn Coffey has had her book “Marcella” banned in several libraries. (Photo credit David Loyd)*

MC: “What are the challenges? The challenges are not to get done in by it all, I think. My book “Marcella” because of its sexual content has been banned by libraries in my home town. And a marathon that was to have been given there, a marathon reading of “Marcella,” I finally pulled out of it because it became so controversial as to whether or not I should be allowed to read my book.”

LP: “So what were people most upset about with your book? And what were the general overtones of why they felt this shouldn’t be read out loud?”

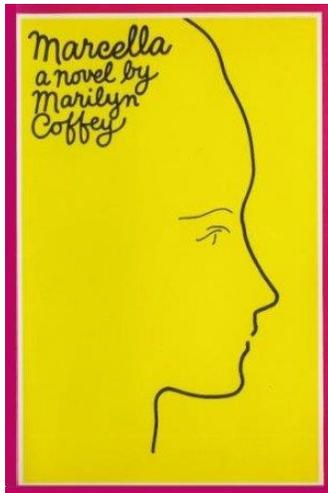
MC: “My book is an extremely unusual one. It’s the first novel written in English, in the history of English literature, to have used female masturbation as a main theme. The descriptions of masturbation in the book are vivid, and in some cases detailed. This is what causes people to be upset. They didn’t want to hear that sort of thing being read out loud. They didn’t want that sort of book to come in their home.”

LP: “Well, and it’s interesting because even as we’re talking and in a radio station it is kind of hard to talk about that. Because some of our listeners might be kind of taken aback by that. And so, talk about that, what seems to be off limits and why they’re off limits?”

MC: “Well, I’m not the one to say what’s off limits, I think that would be a question for the censor, the person who is censoring literature of any sort.”

LP: “The discussion on Wednesday revolves around banned books in general, what topics does the panel plan to cover?”

MC: “We’ll be talking about my book. I’ve done a little research also, I’ve been astonished at the number of books we consider classic books by well known writers, I’ve been astonished at how many of those have been banned. If you go on the internet you’ll get a list that’s a page after page after page after page so to speak.”



*“Marcella” published in 1973.*

LP: “So do you think as time goes on certain things become less taboo and more socially palatable. Are you noticing from when you first started writing to now something that are a bit more mainstream than they were?”

MC: “Well I think my book is more main stream. When I was talking with Lisa Palto of Concierge Marketing with whom I work, she suggested that we market it for a young adult audience, which initially really surprised me because I’d written it for an adult audience. But it was published originally in 1973, and young people these days are probably more savvy about sexual matters than they would have been then. So I think we’ll be enlarging the readership of the book.”

LP: “And especially with main stream successes like “Fifty Shades of Grey,” it’s seems to be, it’s still kind of something people giggle about, but it seems to be a bit more okay to talk about, to joke about on the radio or on TV. Is that encouraging to you? And do you plan more works like that? Or do you think you paved the way for future writers to kind of go down that path?”

MC: “I also write historical books, I’m working right now on one called Thieves, Rascals, and Sore Losers, it’s a sort of fresh look at Nebraska history and the dirty deals that caused it to come into being. So, I won’t be talking sex there, but I’ll be talking about dirty deals of another kind.”

LP: “So Marilyn, what are some of the reasons, and the most frequent reasons for banning books, or for censoring books?”

MC: “There are lots of them, but some are particularly notable. For instance, a sexually explicit book is more often banned than any other kind. The second most banned is a book that contains offensive language. And as you can see those two can also be partners of one sort. And after that the number of censorships drops down, violence, nudity, homosexuality, other kinds of things.”

LP: “Do you see a connection between banned books and maybe more female oriented experiences or subjects?”

MC: “Well I think when you talk about banning books because of their sexual content. Traditionally, that’s going to be because of what’s happening either to a woman, with a woman, about a woman. Yeah, I think it is more common. There’s a book called *Portnoy's Complaint* by Phillip Roth that takes the subject of male masturbation out the window and his book is comic and very funny. I don’t know that it’s been censored, I don’t know that it hasn’t. But I think there’s more leeway for a male writer than a female here. I think a female gets ostracized faster, quicker.”

LP: “The Banned Books Week panel discussion will take place Wednesday October 3 at the W. Clarke Swanson Library at 6:30 p.m. Thank you, Marilyn.”

MC: “You’re welcome.”