

Emilie Richards

USA TODAY bestselling author Emilie Richards recalls fondly the summer she served as a VISTA volunteer in the Arkansas Ozarks. Although conditions were primitive and resources scarce, at the end the 20-year-old college student left with a richness of experience that would forever change her life and ultimately inspire a series of novels about the age-old craft of quilting.

“This was the country’s third-poorest county,” Richards says. “In the area where we worked there were no phones, no running water and no indoor plumbing. These were hardworking families who grew what they put on their tables. There was little color in their lives, but the women did what women have been doing for centuries. They created beauty out of nothing—turning scraps of old clothing and feed sacks into exquisitely beautiful quilts.”

Richards remembers that the women insisted she quilt with them in the evenings, “and then later they’d take out my stitches. But I left the Ozarks a different person. I don’t run water needlessly. I recycle everything. I don’t waste food. And,” she adds, “I quilt every chance I can.”

After her stint in the Ozarks, Richards went on to finish her undergraduate degree in American studies from Florida State University, and her master’s in family development from Virginia Tech. She subsequently counseled in a mental health center and in several pastoral counseling centers, and served as a parent services coordinator for Head Start families before she began writing full-time.

Richards says that in every social service position she held, she gained more than she gave. “I set out to help people and ended up learning so much more about myself.”

A full-time writer, Richards has drawn on those experiences while writing more than seventy novels. As her star has risen in the publishing world, she has appeared on national television and been quoted in *Reader’s Digest*, right between Oprah and Thomas Jefferson. Many of her earlier romances were made into television movies in Germany and her books have been translated into more than sixteen languages.

Although in recent years she has broadened the scope of her writing to women’s fiction and a traditional mystery series, she was awarded the prestigious RITA® Award, romance publishing’s Oscar®, for her earlier work in the genre. *Romantic Times BOOKreviews* magazine has presented her with numerous awards, including one for career achievement.

No doubt Richards's background as a counselor is partly responsible for the award-winning nature of her novels. This background enables her to consistently deliver richly textured family stories that explore the human condition.

Richards is married to her college sweetheart, a retired Unitarian Universalist minister, and those years of church life are responsible for the creation of the Ministry is Murder mysteries, about a minister's wife who solves murders in a tiny Ohio town. Emilie and her husband, who now divide their time between Western New York and Sarasota, Florida, have three grown sons and a daughter. Born in Bethesda, Maryland, and raised in St. Petersburg, Florida, Richards has lived in Virginia, Louisiana, California, Arkansas, Ohio and Pennsylvania. She and her family also spent two four-month sabbaticals in Adelaide, Australia.

When not writing or quilting, Richards enjoys kayaking and traveling. She is currently plotting her next novel.