
It is the summer of 1985 in Sunset Beach, North Carolina, when two teenagers, Campbell and Lindsey, meet and fall in love. Readers are introduced to them as the summer is ending and Campbell takes Lindsey to *the mailbox*. He tells her it’s a special place and that it will always be *their* special place. He asks her to leave a note in the mailbox as her private message to the Kindred Spirit and says that they will always come back to the mailbox and share that special place. Then the book jumps to 2004. We see Lindsey again; her marriage is falling apart and she and her two children are heading for Sunset Beach—her favorite place in the whole world. Lindsey is leaving behind her cheating husband, and she is also returning to Sunset Beach with memories of a long-ago summer romance and the hope that the magic in the mailbox will help her find happiness.

The Kindred Spirit mailbox is a landmark familiar to residents and visitors at Sunset Beach. It’s in the dunes on Bird Island, a mile and a quarter past the last public beach access on Sunset Beach. Visitors to the mailbox find empty notebooks, pens, and pencils, and they fill the notebooks with their stories, words of wisdom, and prayers, leaving their writings for other visitors to find and for the Kindred Spirit. Whalen uses the mailbox to connect Campbell and Lindsey even as their lives take them in different directions. The book alternates between past and present as it weaves the tale of these two lives. Lindsey and Campbell lose one another, but Lindsey returns to Sunset Beach each summer, always leaving a letter for the Kindred Spirit. The story is told in her letters and in snippets of their lives, interleaving pieces from 2004 with pieces
from the intervening years. The patchwork helps hold readers’ interest as bit by bit we find out about Lindsey and Campbell and their lives.

*The Mailbox* is the first of three novels by North Carolina native Marybeth Whalen, who has also written nonfiction for a Christian audience. *She Makes It Look Easy*, a novel about motherhood and friendship came out in 2011. In *The Guest Book*, just published in July 2012, Whalen again sends her leading character to Sunset Beach to try to heal a broken heart. *The Mailbox* is like a Nicholas Sparks novel, but with Christian appeal. While it is somewhat predictable, it is a heartwarming beach read that will appeal to women interested in Christian love stories. *The Mailbox* is suitable for public libraries.

Katherine R. Winslow  
North Carolina Wesleyan College