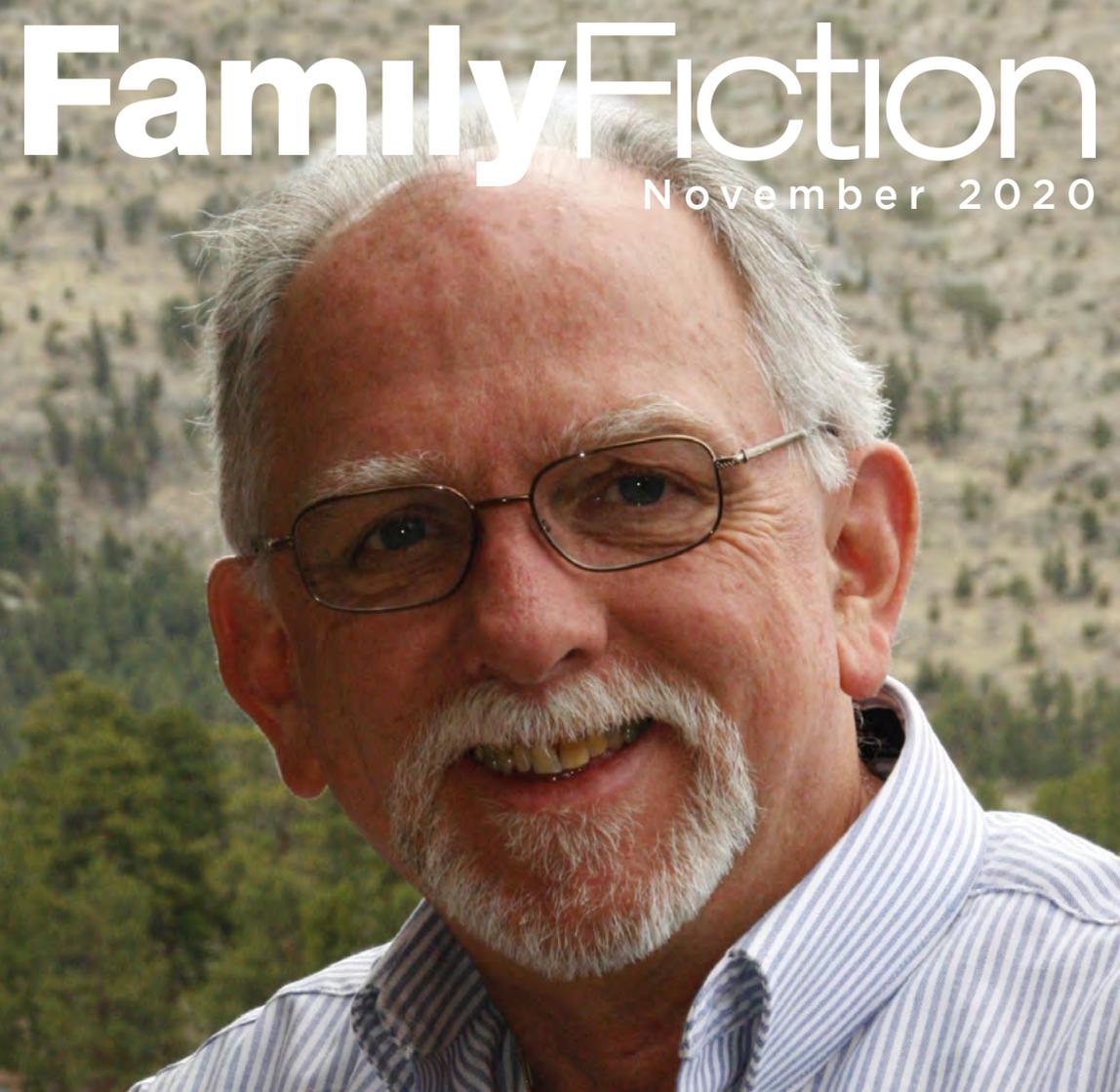


FamilyFiction

November 2020

A close-up portrait of Terry Brennan, a middle-aged man with short, graying hair, wearing glasses and a light-colored goatee. He is smiling slightly and wearing a blue and white striped button-down shirt. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with green foliage and a light-colored wall.

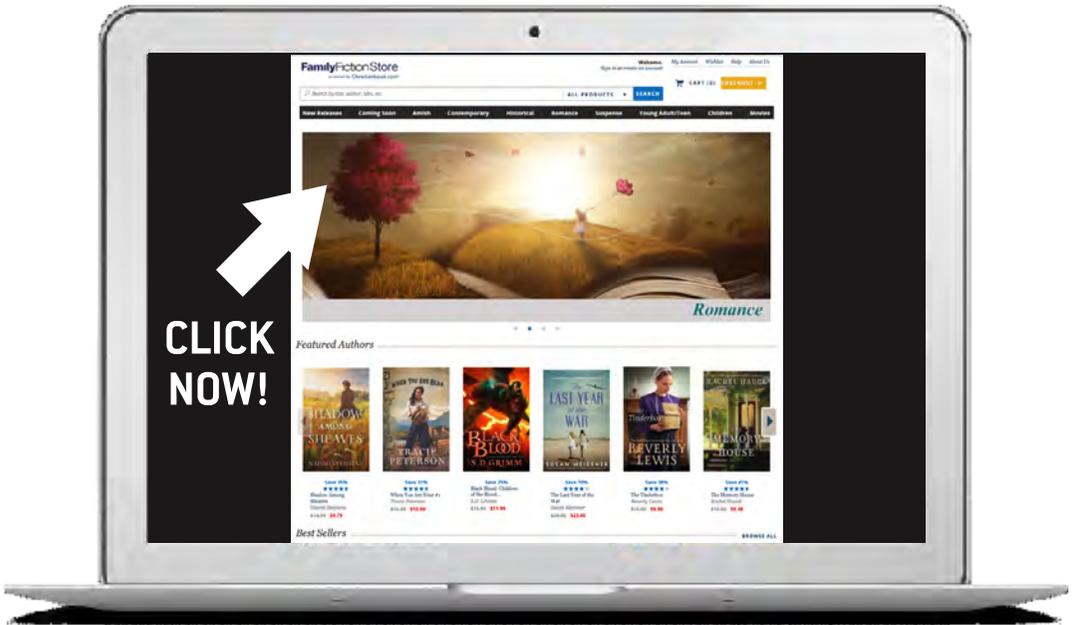
Speculative Author
TERRY BRENNAN

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Publisher/GM

Ross Cluver
Ross@FamilyFiction.com

Editor

Chris Well
Chris@FamilyFiction.com

Editorial Assistant

Erica Well
Erica@FamilyFiction.com

Proofreader

Michele Thompson

Design & Digital Production

Ross Cluver

National Account Executive Salem Media Group

DeDe Donatelli-Tarrant
805.987.5072
DeDe@salempublishing.com

Web Ad Traffic Coordinator Web & Social Media Support

Brandon Woolum
BWoolum@salempublishing.com

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SPECULATIVE: TERRY BRENNAN

THE ALARM IS RINGING

The author shares the prophetic leanings fueling his new thriller series.

In **Terry Brennan's** *Empires of Armageddon Series*, Diplomatic Security Service Regional Security Officer Brian Mullaney has been tasked with an incredibly dangerous mission—to deliver the Vilna Gaon's second prophecy, along with the deadly box that protects it, to the rabbis at the Hurva Synagogue in Jerusalem. When a synagogue is destroyed by an explosion, both the prophecy and box are buried in the rubble along with the answers Mullaney so desperately needs.

How can he discover the meaning of the centuries-old prophecy now? Why are he and the ambassador he's assigned to protect being targeted? Is there any way he alone can thwart a nuclear arms race?

In this interview, Brennan shares more about the series, talks about the spiritual warfare his hero faces, and reveals the prophetic inspiration for his story.

Can you give us a quick introduction to the *Empires of Armageddon Series* and what took place in book one, *Ishmael Covenant*?

Three ancient empires are rushing toward a collision in the volatile Middle East, an official high in the US State Department is conspiring with a foreign power against the US president, a centuries-old prophecy is unveiled that heralds Christ's imminent return, and malevolent, created, eternal beings—fallen angels—are determined to invalidate biblical prophecy



so they can manufacture a different ending to the Bible, reversing the outcome of the battle of Armageddon.

In *Ishmael Covenant*, Diplomatic Security Service agent Brian Mullaney is banished to Israel to protect the new US ambassador, Joseph Atticus Cleveland. Mullaney and the ambassador are thrust into the cauldron of Middle East conflict—political, personal, and spiritual conflict. They come into possession of an ancient, lethal metal box that supposedly holds a second prophecy that could both threaten the nascent peace treaty between Israel and its Arab neighbors—the *Ishmael Covenant*—and also reveal the insidious plot of their evil enemies.

Mullaney finds himself fighting for the life of the ambassador and his daughter, for his own crippled marriage, and in a spiritual battle (for which he is unprepared) against the agents of evil who are determined to destroy the box, the prophecy, and the Middle East as we know it.

Where does the second book, *Persian Betrayal*, pick up the action? Will readers be able to join in if they haven't read the first installment?

The story in *Persian Betrayal* commences exactly where *Ishmael Covenant* ends, with the destruction of the Hurva Synagogue in Jerusalem by agents of the Turk, an otherworldly servant of evil. The Turk and his men are still trying to destroy the prophecy of the Vilna Gaon and the box that protects it.

I believe the story would be more deeply understood and appreciated by reading *Ishmael Covenant* before *Persian Betrayal*. Even though the entire trilogy has one overarching narrative story, each book in the series is complete in itself. Each contains a compelling and rewarding story arc, but each book also ends with a cliff-hanger conclusion designed to propel the reader further into the following book.

The whole trilogy takes place in a short time span. Does that make it harder or easier to write the series?

Both. Confining the majority of the trilogy's plot structure to a relatively compact span of time built a world that—for me—remained vibrant, alive, and active throughout the writing process and limited the amount of research necessary. On the negative side, because of the worldwide stage upon which the trilogy plays out (over a large number of time zones), the significant cast of characters, and the rapid shifts in action from one locale to another, keeping the scenes in the correct order was a challenge.

For each book, I created an Excel spreadsheet outline/timeline for myself that tracked the date and time for each scene. I also included the time stamp in the book with each change of scene

to help orient the reader. Each line of my spreadsheet also included a short, descriptive sentence about what happened in each scene, so if I had to move scenes around, they were still in sequential order.

Still, there were several instances where I got into a significant bind. Squeezing that much action into a short time span was certainly arduous.

The prologue shares a fictional retelling of Moses and the battle against the Amalekites from Joshua’s perspective. Is the inclusion of this story tied to the prophecies central to the story line of the series?

I don’t think it gives anything away too soon, but one portion of the second prophecy is deciphered to read “. . . *when the sons of Amalek are invited to the king’s banquet . . .*” In the Bible, following the battle of Rephidim—where Moses’s arms are kept raised by Aaron and Hur while the Israelite army routs a much larger army of Amalekites—Moses tells Joshua that God spoke, “I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven.”

Historically, it is a widely held belief that the nomadic tribes known as Amalek were the descendants of Ishmael, Abraham’s illegitimate son by Hagar. These tribes became the Bedouin nomads who eventually populated vast stretches of the desert on both sides of the Red Sea and are now known as Arabs.

The enmity between Arabs and Jews (the sons of Jacob) has continued for centuries. Within my story, when Israel signs a peace treaty, known as the Ishmael Covenant, with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and the Arab states along the Persian

Gulf, that covenant can certainly be interpreted as Amalek being “invited to the king’s banquet.”

In *Persian Betrayal*, that line, and other lines in the Vilna Gaon’s second prophecy, are a prophetic warning to the nation of Israel—one that may be too late to heed.

How do the spiritual themes of the series such as spiritual warfare carry through in *Persian Betrayal*?

From the time the Vilna Gaon, a Jewish Talmudic genius, wrote two prophecies in 1794, relentless forces of evil arrayed against him to destroy the prophecies and prevent them from fulfilling their purpose. Those forces of evil were created, eternal beings—fallen angels. To protect the Gaon and the prophecies, angels from the throne room of God were dispatched to join the battle, a battle waged both in the heavenly realms and also on the earth.

In the Bible, the book of Ephesians references “heavenly realms” five times and refers to the battle “against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers . . . against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

In this series, our protagonist, Brian Mullaney, is drawn into this conflict against desperate evil forces who want to change the end of the Bible with an earthly battle that has eternal consequences. My *NIV Study Bible* has a note on Ephesians 1 that reads, “The spiritual struggle of the saints here and now is not so much against ‘flesh and blood’ as against the great spiritual forces that war against God in heaven.”

The spiritual warfare in *Persian Betrayal* is real, personal,



dangerous, and frightening to our characters. And its outcome has eternal ramifications. Not so much different than today.

Is the Vilna Gaon a fictional character, and are his prophecies a product of your imagination?

The Vilna Gaon, Rabbi Elijah ben Solomon Zalman, was a real person who lived from 1720 to 1797 in Vilnius, Lithuania. A lifelong student of the Jewish scripture, the Gaon authored voluminous and accurate notes and explanations of Talmudic and other texts.

He was internationally revered as one of the most familiar and influential figures in rabbinic study since the Middle Ages. A vigorous Talmudist and kabbalist, the Vilna Gaon was the foremost leader of non-Hasidic Jews of his time, and his followers remain active in Jewish scriptural interpretation and debate to this day.

In late March 2014, Rabbi Moshe Shturnbuch, the Gaon's great-great-grandson, actually revealed a prophecy written by the Gaon in 1794. In part, the prophecy said, "When you hear that the Russians have captured the city of Crimea, you should know that the times of the Messiah have started, that his steps are being heard."

About a month earlier, on February 27, 2014, in the midst of political upheaval in the Crimea, Russian special forces seized the buildings of the Crimean Supreme Council and Council of Ministers. Russian flags were raised over these buildings, fulfilling the 210-year-old prophecy.

While the Gaon's actual prophecy is written into my fictional series, the story of the second prophecy is a product of my imagination.

What mission is Brian Mullaney tasked with?

Brian Mullaney is a highly regarded, nineteen-year veteran of the Diplomatic Security Service, the 2,500-person armed force that protects American foreign service personnel overseas and the most widely represented law enforcement agency in the world. Presenting a danger to a rogue US State Department deputy secretary, Mullaney is banished to Israel as regional security officer and assigned to protect new US Ambassador Joseph Atticus Cleveland and all the foreign service personnel in Israel. Mullaney, however, is also enlisted into another task.

Through the influence of the massive angel Bayard, and the insistence of aged Rabbi Mordechai Herzog, Mullaney finds himself responsible for a metal box, emblazoned with kabbalistic symbols, that has gruesomely killed anyone who touches it.

Originally the protective container of the Vilna Gaon's second prophecy, the "box of power" now has a mission of its own, a mission that will put both Mullaney's life and the life of Ambassador Cleveland at risk and transport Mullaney into the darkest depths of hell on earth.

**How does Brian's faith prove a challenge in his work?
Does he feel a pull between serving God and doing his job?**

Brian Mullaney is a get-in-touch-with-God Christian. It's not until the third book that his church is even mentioned. But his close, personal connection to God is evident throughout the series as he prays urgently and fervently on several occasions, pleading for God's help and direction in the massive challenges facing him.

He seeks God's guidance on how to resurrect his marriage to Abby and rescue his family even though he's nearly halfway around the globe. He prays to be faithful to his duty as the DSS's top security officer in the Middle East and the man most responsible for the life and safety of Ambassador Cleveland. And he must rely on God in coming to grips with the daunting spiritual responsibility others want to place on his shoulders and in learning to live with the recent loss of his father and the wounds that were never healed.

In *Persian Betrayal*, Mullaney begins to suffer through the agonizing choices he needs to make while dealing with nearly constant attacks from a group of Turkish terrorists who have put all their lives at risk. Desperate to get home and repair his rocky marriage, yet determined to faithfully serve Cleveland and fulfill his duty, Mullaney must face one of the most crushing moments of his career while he awaits God to answer his pleas.

What pressures does Brian experience from home? Would he be able to step away from the situation even if he wanted to?

Abigail and Brian Mullaney have been married for nearly twenty years. The first ten were great. The second ten were not so hot as they endured the consequences of moving eleven times from one assignment to another. But Brian promised Abby this was it—his assignment to Washington, DC, was the last move. They could settle down, and the girls could go to the same school. When he got unfairly booted out of DC and dispatched to Israel, Abby refused to go with him.

Mullaney was caught between promises—one to himself that he would never shirk his duty or betray a confidence, and the second to Abby that she would never have to move her family again. Abby had a simple question for her husband: “Who’s more important, Brian? Me? Your daughters? Or your job at the State Department?”

To Mullaney the answers were “Yes” and “Yes,” but he knew that would never fly at home. Was his only option resignation from the Diplomatic Security Service? Could he turn his back on his duty? The answer to that question could cost him the most precious people in his life.

The *Empires of Armageddon Series* is categorized as end-times fiction, as it features prophecies and an epic battle. Many people believe everything that has been going on in 2020 are prophetic signs. What do you think personally of all this talk?

Wars and rumors of wars. Famine. Now a global plague the likes of which hasn’t been seen in a century. And an unprec-

edented, mammoth invasion of locust ravaging the African continent. Sounds ominous, all right. The moral decline in our nation—where what was once illegal, and always immoral, is now celebrated openly in the streets—has been precipitous. The cultural persecution of Christians is more subtle but growing ever more virulent.

I blame myself. I was born in 1947 and went to college from 1964 to 1968 in the midst of the cultural revolution that reversed the ethical and moral compass of America. I marched and protested, trampled the faith of my youth, and lived a free life. I sowed the seeds for the moral disaster we are watching unfold today.

Do I think we're looking at end-times harbingers today? If not now, it won't be long. The clock started ticking with the 1948 birth of the nation of Israel. More than seven decades have already count down. Are we closing in on our final hours? I don't know. But I think the alarm is ringing.

One of your endorsements describes the series as a look at the dark world of political corruption. Is any of that element of the story based on actual events?

Not in the sense that we would normally think of political corruption. I'm not writing about bribes and backroom deals, rigged elections, graft and embezzlement, conflicts of interest, or abuse of power. But there are definitely some dark deeds in the halls of power. The only actual event referred to in the series is what's known as the Iran nuclear deal.

But in this fictional world, there is a traitor in the State Department who's trying to prevent the deal from being

consummated, not because of a political agenda but because a billionaire banker doesn't want to lose the \$2 billion in Iranian funds frozen in his banks since the Iranian hostage crisis of 1979.

In the book there is a coup overthrowing a legitimate government, a number of international double crosses, and power-driven men intent on resurrecting ancient empires, regardless of the cost. Not unlike actual events but, no, not based on any truth that I know.

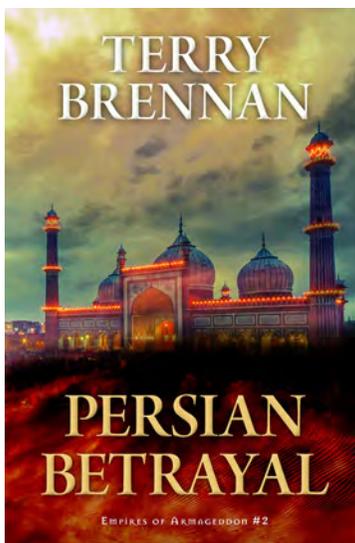
Can you give us a sneak peek into the final installment of the series, *Ottoman Dominion*?

How not to give away all the good parts? Let's just say that after Mullaney endures a devastating loss at the end of *Persian Betrayal*, all the diverse plotlines converge when Ambassador Cleveland decides to take the situation into his own hands. He determines to go AWOL from Tel Aviv without his security detail and flies to Ankara to confront Turkish president Emet Kashani.

But when Cleveland finds his life and soul in mortal danger, Brian Mullaney must find a way to fulfill all the missions God has rested upon his shoulders—rescue the ambassador, resurrect his marriage, and fulfill the destiny of the box of power. *Ottoman Dominion* is nearly nonstop action that comes to a remarkable, unexpected, and very personal ending. **FF**

Visit Terry Brennan's author page here:

<https://www.familyfiction.com/authors/terry-brennan>



Persian Betrayal

Empires of Armageddon #2

Terry Brennan

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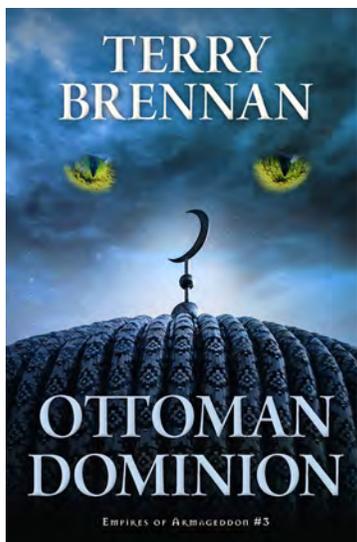


How much can Brian Mullaney risk to serve God and save lives —without losing his own?

DSS Regional Security Officer Mullaney has been tasked with an incredibly dangerous mission. When a synagogue in Jerusalem is destroyed by an explosion, burying the second key prophecy Mullaney is hunting--and the deadly box that protects it--the answers he desperately needs are also crushed. How can he discover the meaning of the centuries-old prophecy now? Why are he and the ambassador he's assigned to protect being targeted? And is there any way this lone man can thwart a nuclear arms race between three ascendant empires of the past?

An otherworldly servant of evil known only as the Turk is maneuvering all three nations into an intricate dance designed to undermine prophecy about the end times. And he won't let Mullaney or anyone else get in his way.

Wounded in a bloody shoot-out, pressured by his wife to come home, and mourning the death of his best friend, Mullaney doesn't need a powerful enemy. Who is he to save the Ishmael Covenant, the treaty promising peace in the Middle East? Despite angelic intervention, Mullaney wants nothing to do with his final assignment. But without him, evil will win the ultimate struggle . . . and humankind will have no hope left.



Ottoman Dominion

Empires of Armageddon #3

Terry Brennan

Kregel Publications



DSS agent Mullaney wants out. He's been drawn against his will into a dangerous international mission with world-ending implications—and his final assignment is going to pit him directly against the terrifying, evil entity known only as the Turk.

But when the Turk's minions breach the US embassy in Israel and the American ambassador disappears, Mullaney has no choice. He must accept his role as the final guardian of a mysterious box, his only weapon against the powers of darkness bent on preventing the second coming of the Messiah, no matter who or what they annihilate to accomplish their goal. Can this man who's already lost so much find the strength and faith to save the world--and fulfill the prophecy of peace?

The final volume of the *Empires of Armageddon Series* will have fans of Joel Rosenberg, Ronie Kendig, and Frank Peretti on the edge of their seats up to the final page.



TIME-SPLIT: LISA WINGATE

THE PAST INFORMS THE PRESENT

The author shares the present-day impact of a heartbreaking chapter in history.

Selected among **BOOKLIST'S** Top 10 for two years running, **Lisa Wingate** writes novels that *Publisher's Weekly* calls "Masterful" and *ForeWord Magazine* refers to as "Filled with lyrical prose, hope, and healing." Her novels have garnered or been short-listed for many awards, including the **Pat Conroy Southern Book Prize**, the **Oklahoma Book Award**, the **Utah Library Award**, the **LORIES Best Fiction Award**, the **Carol Award**, the **Christy Award**, **Family Fiction's Top 10**, **RT Booklover's Reviewer's Choice Award**, and others.

Her novel ***The Book of Lost Friends*** (Ballantine Books) offers the dramatic story of three young women searching for family amid the destruction of the post-Civil War South, and of a modern-day teacher who learns of their story and its vital connection to her students' lives.

In this interview, Lisa shares the historical background of her dual-time novel, explains the significance of the novel's present-day setting, and reveals how her faith impacts her storytelling.

Lisa, in your novel, *Book of Lost Friends*, you're bringing to life actual "Lost Friends" advertisements from after the Civil War. How did you discover their existence?

The spark that became Hannie's and Benny's story came to me in the most modern of ways—via an email from a book lover who'd just spent time with the Foss family while reading

Before We Were Yours. She thought there was another, similar, piece of history I should know about.

As a volunteer with The Historic New Orleans Collection, she'd been entering database information gleaned from advertisements well over a century old. The goal of the project was to preserve the history of the "Lost Friends" column, and to make it accessible to genealogical and historical researchers via the Internet. But the data-entry volunteer saw more than just research material.

"There is a story in each one of these ads," she wrote in her note to me. "Their constant love of family and their continued search for loved ones, some they had not seen in over 40 years."

She attached several photographs of the Lost Friends ads to the email. She wanted me to see them in their original form, in the blotchy newsprint of old hand-crank printing presses, faded by time, but still bearing their heartbreaking yet hopeful messages.

How difficult was it to gather them or find them? How much did your background as a journalist come into play here?

The same reader friend directed me to the "Lost Friends" database, and over 2500 original ads, now digitized on the Internet. There, I tumbled down a rabbit hole of lives long gone, stories and emotions and yearning encapsulated in words that had, until recently, been hidden away in dusty library file cabinets and university archives.

Names that survived perhaps nowhere beyond these desperate pleas of formerly enslaved people, once written in makeshift classrooms, at kitchen tables, and in church halls . . . then sent forth on steam trains and mail wagons, on riverboats and in the saddlebags of rural mail carriers, destined for the remote outposts of a growing country. Far and wide, the missives journeyed, carried on wings of hope.

In their heyday, the “Lost Friends” ads, published in the *Southwestern Christian Advocate*, a Methodist newspaper, went out to nearly five hundred preachers, eight hundred post offices, and more than four thousand subscription-holders. The column header requested that pastors read the contents from their pulpits to spread the word of those seeking the missing.

It also implored those whose searches had ended in success to report back to the newspaper, so that the news might be used to encourage others. The “Lost Friends” advertisements were the equivalent of an ingenious nineteenth-century social media platform, a means of reaching the hinterlands of a divided, troubled, and fractious country still struggling to find itself in the aftermath of war.

I knew that very day, as I took in dozens of the “Lost Friends” ads, meeting family after family, searcher after searcher, that I had to write the story of a family torn apart by greed, chaos, cruelty, despairing of ever again seeing one another. I knew that the “Lost Friends” ads would provide hope where hope had long ago been surrendered.

Other aspects of the story involved much online research, a location trip through East Texas and South Louisiana, personal

interviews, and the study of old books and maps to determine the routes and types of transportation Hannie and her companions would have used in the 1870s to travel from South Louisiana to the frontiers of Texas.

Hannie's story was developed not from history books, but from the voices of lived experience—from original diaries, letters, and books written during the time period, as well as an extensive study of the WPA slave narratives, in which Roosevelt's Federal Writers interviewed the last survivors of slavery to preserve their stories.

The ideas behind *The Book of Lost Friends* are so heartbreaking. What was it about these particular three girls that inspired you to write their story? Was any of it based on real life events?

Hannie began speaking to me after I read an ad placed by a woman named Caroline Flowers. I knew Hannie's fictional situation would, in some ways, be directed by the life of Caroline Flowers, but that Hannie's search would lead her to strike off on a quest.

Her journey would be life-altering, an odyssey of sorts. It would change her forever, redirecting her future. I knew she would set off on her journey with two unlikely traveling companions, each with her own secrets and her own reasons for embarking on a perilous trip to Texas.

Which of the four young ladies did you find the most challenging to write?

Each was challenging in different ways. Every character's story is more than just a physical journey. Beyond the adventure,

there's the journey into the human soul, and that is always the harder part to piece together. I meet the characters as you'd meet any new person in real life, with only surface impressions at first.

Developing the deeper story becomes a process of coming to know what's happening on the inside, where they've been, what inner journeys they're traveling as human beings. The four young women in *The Book of Lost Friends* come from very divergent life circumstances. Their wounds and goals are different, yet on a human level they share the same deep need for love, acceptance, a sense of purpose and place in the world.

The novel also includes two time periods—the Reconstruction-era South of the 1870s and 1980s Louisiana.

(Without spoilers) what made you counterbalance the historical parts with sections set more recently (instead of, perhaps, keeping it all in the 1870s?)

I enjoy crafting stories in dual time frames, melding a modern-day story with a historical one. I like looking at history through the eyes of a modern-day character, exploring the lessons that can be learned from those long-ago people who lived, and loved, and left their stories behind.

To me, it's important to show how the contemporary character's discovery of the historical story will change modern life. What lessons will be learned? What habits, self-perceptions, future plans might be changed? What secrets might be revealed?

It adds another layer to the story, and I think most of us wonder about the rumors, tall tales and oft-repeated anecdotes in our families and communities. Stories in dual time

frames are all about discovering connections and revealing history's power to teach.

Where do you find the dividing line between keeping your story true to the historical record and taking license for the sake of the story?

When I write about a fascinating nugget of history, I try to stay true to the history for the most part. I seek out those voices of lived experience through documents written in the time period. I want to hear the cadence of the language, to know what things people thought about and talked about, to understand how they spent their days, how they accomplished even ordinary mundane tasks.

What were their passions? What were their worries? What was happening in the world around them? The characters are my own, but they are also composites of ordinary people from times past.

In *The Book Of Lost Friends*, I reimagined history a bit to suit the girls' ages, setting the story in 1875, ten years after the ending of the war. While separated families had been placing ads in various newspapers since the war's close, distribution of the "Lost Friends" column actually sprang to life in 1877 and continued through the early part of the twentieth century.

What are you hoping your readers take away from *The Book of Lost Friends*?

There's no way to completely understand all the places a story comes from in a writer's mind, or the combination of experiences, emotions, and perspectives that create it. Similarly, it's impossible to predict what each reader will take away from the story.

No two people read the same book. We each see the world, on the page and beyond it, through our own personal lens. Each lens is unique, and that's as it should be.

More than anything, I hope readers take away a deep understanding of the history as it was, of the human costs, of the pain and hopes of the freedmen and freedwomen who placed the Lost Friends ads. Their strength, their determination, their love of family are a reminder that, underlying our differences, are basic needs that draw us together as human beings.

What are the best things you've heard back from readers?

The most gratifying letters from readers of *The Book of Lost Friends* have been those from readers who discovered the Lost Friends ads through the book, then visited the Lost Friends database online and then found ads written by their own ancestors.

Beyond that, I treasure the connections that a story can create between people and the change that can come from something so simple as a book. Story is our one chance to live within the mind, and heart, and body, and soul of another person.

It has not only the power to entertain, but to uplift, to comfort, to buoy, to enlighten, to ease loneliness, to build empathy, to deepen old friendships, and to create new ones. There is nothing like knowing that, in book form, you've walked through the dark night of the soul with someone you never would have known otherwise.

After thirty-two books and twenty years, I'm still in awe of the world-changing potential of books.

Why is storytelling such a powerful way to communicate truth?

I've always been fascinated by the power of history, the lives of people long gone, and the lessons they offer. Storytelling takes what is foreign and far away and makes it relevant through the experience of fictional characters. Through story, readers live those experiences with the characters. There's great value in that.

Reading not only grows our understanding of the world, it fosters and strengthens our connection to the rest of humanity. As a writer, that's the journey I travel with each story and it's the experience I hope to pass along to readers, as well. For me, a good story, whether you read it or write it, becomes a life experience.

Can you share some examples of how your faith impacts your storytelling?

With every book, I hope to change people, to lift them up, to leave readers better off than I found them. I never want a reader to leave one of my stories feeling down, depressed, or hopeless. I want readers to come away with a sense of God's grace. For me, if a story doesn't bolster faith and create hope, it hasn't done its job.

Every once in a while, I'll hear from a reader who says, "Your stories make me want to be a better person." That's my goal in writing—to reinforce the belief that it is possible to reject the bad and cling to the good, that good is ultimately stronger.

It's not just my goal for the reader, it's my goal for myself as a writer. Every story is an opportunity to grow and refocus the

spirit, and show God working in both worlds—the one we imagine within a book, and the one we live in beyond the pages.

What are the best things readers can do to support their favorite authors?

Oh, gosh! The list is long...

Support your local book places... bookstores and libraries, those places where you wander in to find a certain book and end up hours later with an armload of books. Fill your shelves, buy books as gifts, donate books to your library, senior citizen facilities, the corner in the church that can become a library... any nook and cranny where books can draw readers. Release books “into the wild” by leaving them on a park bench or a bus seat, one by one to delight another person.

Start a book club or join a book club and lobby for your favorite books to become a club reads. Write reviews at online retailer and reader sites. Browsers want to know what other readers say about a book.

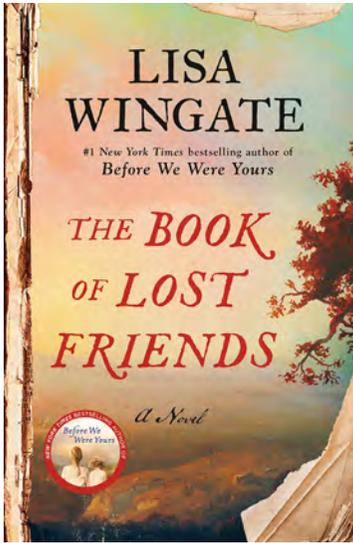
Recommend books on your social media pages. Share pictures of your favorite reads, your reading places, your bookshelf.

Drop a note to the author and share your experiences with the book. Storytelling is, at heart, about building human connections. It’s hard to express, as a writer, how much it means to hear from readers. **FF**

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Lisa Wingate



The Book of Lost Friends

Lisa Wingate
Ballantine Books

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The dramatic story of three young women searching for family amid the destruction of the post-Civil War South, and of a modern-day teacher who learns of their story and its vital connection to her students' lives.

Bestselling author Lisa Wingate brings to life startling stories from actual “Lost Friends” advertisements that appeared in Southern newspapers after the Civil War, as newly freed slaves desperately searched for loved ones who had been sold away.

Louisiana, 1875: In the tumultuous era of Reconstruction, three young women set off as unwilling companions on a perilous quest: Hannie, a freed slave; Lavinia, the pampered heir to a now destitute plantation; and Juneau Jane, Lavinia’s Creole half sister. Each carries private wounds and powerful secrets as they head for Texas, following roads rife with vigilantes and soldiers still fighting a war lost a decade before. For Lavinia and Juneau Jane, the journey is one of stolen inheritance and financial desperation, but for Hannie, torn from her mother and siblings before slavery’s end, the pilgrimage west reignites an agonizing question: Could her long-lost family still be out there? Beyond the swamps lie the limitless frontiers of Texas and, improbably, hope.

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Lisa Wingate

Louisiana, 1987: For first-year teacher Benedetta Silva, a subsidized job at a poor rural school seems like the ticket to canceling her hefty student debt—until she lands in a tiny, out-of-step Mississippi River town. Augustine, Louisiana, is suspicious of new ideas and new people, and Benny can scarcely comprehend the lives of her poverty-stricken students. But amid the gnarled live oaks and run-down plantation homes lie the century-old history of three young women, a long-ago journey, and a hidden book that could change everything.

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HISTORICAL: BRYAN LITFIN

MORE THAN “EVANGELICALS IN TOGAS”

The author and former theology professor compares and contrasts what early Christians believed with what many in the church believe today.

A former professor of theology at the **Moody Bible Institute**, **Bryan Litfin** is the author of several works of fiction and nonfiction, including *Early Christian Martyr Stories* and *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*.

His latest novel, the historical epic ***The Conqueror*** (Revell), kicks off the ***Constantine’s Empire Series***. Set three hundred years after the dates of Christ and the Apostles, Bryan’s novels flesh out how the early Christians dealt with the shifting world around them.

In this interview, the author explains the historical underpinnings of the series, shares why some modern readers will be surprised by the Christians in his novel, and outlines what the epic series can teach us about the history of the church.

Brian, tell us a little about your new historical novel *The Conqueror*.

The plot takes place in the Roman Empire during the ancient church period, though *not* in New Testament times. Almost three hundred years after Christ and the apostles, the Emperor Constantine is a frontier general contemplating conversion to Christianity. But his great enemy Maxentius is entrenched in Rome, and battle looms.



Constantine sends the hero of this novel ahead of him to spy on Rome. Rex is a young, powerful Germanic warrior who has joined the Roman army as a special forces operative. But upon arriving in Rome, he meets someone intriguing: a beautiful Christian girl named Flavia, a senator's daughter.

Together they work to bring down the wicked and decadent Maxentius, facing dangers and trials side by side. It all comes to a climax at the famous Battle of the Milvian Bridge in AD 312. The winner will determine the future of the empire. Will Constantine conquer by the sign of the cross and emerge victorious? Or will the ancient gods of Maxentius continue to hold the people in bondage to pagan religion?

You have a degree in journalism, a Master's in Historical Theology, and a Ph.D in Ancient Church History. What is it about the ancient world—and church history specifically—that draws you to make it your life's work?

My journey didn't start with much of an appreciation of the ancients. I remember a high school Bible teacher of mine trying to teach me about St. Augustine, and I found it boring and irrelevant. At that time, I was too immature to understand the value of history. Even during college, I didn't pay it much mind.

It was only when I got to seminary that I began to appreciate my ancient forefathers and foremothers in the faith. I began to feel that my Christian faith had to be bigger and grander than just the little "box" of Christianity that I had known so far. Church history was full of characters whom I didn't know—some heroes, some villains, and some that skirted the line between the two.

I also realized that my biblical interpretation would be very limited without any historical wisdom to guide me. In seminary, I thought that if I learned Greek and Hebrew, I would have the magic key to unlock the Bible.

But all it did was give me the ability to find even MORE interpretations! What wisdom could "lead me into all truth"? The Paraclete, of course. But does the Holy Spirit work in an individualistic way? Or does He whisper truth into the ears of all believers—not just in 2020, but in all centuries? Who am I to think that my views and my interpretations are obviously the best, or that I don't need any words of advice from those who ran the race before me?

The truth is, we have a great cloud of witnesses—not just the Old Testament heroes in Hebrews 11, but now also from church history, too! I have made it my life's work to introduce my fellow believers to our ancient church ancestors—through classroom teaching, through non-fiction books, and now also through historical fiction. *Soli Deo Gloria!*

This story takes place in the realm of ancient Christianity. How did your expertise in this area help you write the book? What kind of research was required?

I am deeply acquainted with the literature, archaeology, and outlook of the people of the ancient church. Most novelists have to look up things about their historical period and include them in the story.

But it didn't quite happen like that for me. This material has been my scholarly field of expertise for twenty-five years. I've been reading, writing, and making presentations on this stuff for a long time.

I have a doctorate in it. I have also traveled extensively to Italy and throughout the Mediterranean and former imperial lands.

So, when I wrote *The Conqueror*, I didn't just pull from book knowledge but from a deep reservoir of familiarity with the ancient church. I think that injects a lot of realism into the story.

These are not evangelical Christians wearing togas and sporting green leaves in their hair. They think and act like the ancient Christians actually did. Some of that might be surprising to modern Christians.

What would you say are some areas where ancient Christians might be different from what modern Christians expect?

It is sometimes the case that modern believers think the early Christians were just like us—what I call “evangelicals in togas.” It’s as if you put your pastor in sandals and a robe, added some green leaves to his hair, and sent him back in time.

We imagine he would fit right in as an “ancient Roman.” Though we all know that’s just silly nonsense, we still tend to think that they were just like us.

Now let me say, in certain basic respects, they were. They worshiped the crucified and risen Jesus just like us. Yet the differences were profound, as well.

Here are a few examples:

We tend to emphasize the cross in salvation, whereas they emphasized the resurrection. Crosses were gruesome and shameful. For them, the “good news” was not only that “Jesus died on the cross” but that he died “and rose again!”

The early Christians never failed to proclaim the resurrection as essential to salvation. The work of Christ did not end at the cross, but only when the light of Easter burst from the empty tomb.

The early Christians also expected hostility from the people around them. Today, Christians in the West have the idea that their culture should tolerate them, or even admire them if they do good things. At the very least, the culture or the govern-

ment will refrain from outright persecution. And this is because our society does make freedom of religion a human right.

But is that promised to us by God? Just the opposite: Jesus said his followers would be hated by the world. The early Christians lived under the constant threat of persecution. They considered it a possibility even during times when there wasn't an outbreak.

Cultural hostility is actually the norm for Christians. Buckle up, brothers and sisters, because it might be coming sooner than we think.

The early Christians also had, I think, a greater appreciation for physical things than we do. We tend to think that spiritual things must be immaterial and "from above," while physical things are lowly and mundane.

But with a profound theology of Incarnation comes a theology that "deifies" all matter, insofar as that matter can be made into a holy vessel to communicate the things of Christ. Common, everyday things like bread and wine can become real vessels of spiritual nourishment.

Likewise, architectural beauty and art are not "extras," but incarnational means of grace for the good of the church. When the early Christians finally got the chance to start building their own churches, they built grand ones because their vision of God was grand.

They thought He was worth lavish expenditure, like the woman who anointed Jesus's feet. Christians are supposed to

experience physical things as a means of grace—and that is something not all modern evangelicals are aware of.

***The Conqueror* deals with Constantine, the first Christian emperor. How is Constantine a symbol of the complicated relationship between church and state?**

Under Constantine, the ancient church transitioned from an age of persecution to an age of imperial patronage. Instead of being killed by the emperors, Christians suddenly found themselves being favored and having resources and influence.

That can be viewed as both good and bad. Not too long after Constantine—and culminating a process that he began—the empire adopted Christianity as its official state religion and tore down the temples of the idols.

Because this was the first instance of a “state church,” and because that scenario continued for many centuries afterward, Constantine has become a symbol of the union of church and state. That brought a lot of benefits to Christianity, such as theological expansion and numerical growth, not to mention the end of martyrdom.

But did this more comfortable situation water down the vigor and commitment of the earliest church?

How are some of the issues *Rex and Flavia* deal with similar to those Christians face today?

The novel’s title is ambiguous. Who is *The Conqueror*? Constantine? Rex the kick-butt warrior? Or is it Christ himself? And what does he conquer? The Roman Empire? Or your own stubborn heart?

One of the themes here is that the Lord demands submission to His will, even when it's very hard. The Christian life can be described as one long, slow trudge toward martyrdom.

Is that gloomy? Well, the Scriptures tell us to crucify the flesh, die to self, fill up in our own bodies what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ. Our Savior suffered and so will we.

We might not have to die for the Lord like the persecuted church, but he might ask some very hard things of us. Is Jesus really your Lord, not just in the good times when obedience is fairly undemanding, but also when he asks for your all—that one thing you don't think you can give up? That's when the Lordship of Christ truly means something. Rex and Flavia both wrestle with those themes.

Beyond this, they deal with issues related to friendship and attraction between a believer and unbeliever. (Rex is unconverted and worships the gods.)

There are also issues of when you should obey your parents and when you must plant your flag of independence, as well as spiritual doubts about whether God will deliver you when it really counts. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

In the novel, Rex serves as a speculator (a spy) in the Roman army and witnesses some gruesome things. How does faith complicate his duty as a soldier?

One issue the ancient church was wrestling with was what constitutes a "just war." Can a Christian soldier fight in the army and kill people? Can he defend the borders against invasion? Who

will stop bad men from doing violence if good men don't oppose them with violence? Or should we always "turn the other cheek" no matter what, letting the bad guys wreak havoc?

So, there is a debate between just war theory versus Christian pacifism. The ancient church was divided on this subject.

The complicating issue with Rex is that he is an unbeliever who doesn't just witness gruesome things but actually does them—in battle and even in more ambiguous settings where it's maybe close to murder.

Yet he is being drawn to the peace and love of the gospel. He worships Thor and Hercules. Can peaceful Jesus really be the God for him? And if so, could the Christian God really forgive his bloody acts? And could Flavia love him if she knew about his violent past? It's a major spiritual trajectory for Rex.

***The Conqueror* is book one in a new series. Without giving away spoilers, how do all the books in the series tie together?**

I believe that by the time the third one is done, you aren't going to have a series but a saga. The historical moment when Rex and Flavia lived was so pivotal.

My plot engages this duo with all the turning points of church history at that time. (It's about an eighteen-year span, actually.)

There's a plot about the construction of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome and finding the actual bones of St. Peter. There's intrigue and danger down in the catacombs underground. There's the council of Nicaea and the Arian heresy. There's the discovery of the True Cross and the Tomb of Christ in Jerusalem.

There's epic travel from Italy to Greece to Egypt to the Germanic frontier to Constantinople. There are ginormous battles in the civil war that was happening at that time that ushered Constantine into power. There's the development of the canon of Scripture. There's the defeat of Gnosticism. There's the doctrine of the Trinity and the Nicene Creed.

All the important church fathers of that era are in the story, like Eusebius of Caesarea and Athanasius and Ossius of Cordoba and the popes. And behind it all is the spiritual journey of Constantine, and the Roman Empire along with him, in which Rome turns from a place that persecutes Christians and makes martyrs to one that favors the church and launches it on a totally new trajectory.

Rex and Flavia are right there in the midst of it all. So, of course you also see their individual evolutions from late teenagers until they're in their mid thirties—and all the personal struggles, joys, and travails they face together.

What do you hope readers take away from this story?

Since I am a professor, I shouldn't admit this, but my number one reader takeaway isn't learning about the ancient church. It's for the reader to have an exciting time, to be colossally entertained.

I think of these books as having a lot in common with adventure stories like the *Indiana Jones* movies. Good guys, bad guys, huge stakes, epic backdrops. The hero and heroine running hand in hand as they elude the villains and take them down. If the reader doesn't experience that thrill, I've failed.

Bryan Litfin

But along the way, the reader might have fun learning about how things really were in the ancient church. And I hope they will be moved by the themes, and in a small way, that my books will help them know God better, to trust him more deeply.

And I hope that many years from now, they'll still remember Rex and Flavia because their story stands out as such a great tale.

What are you working on next?

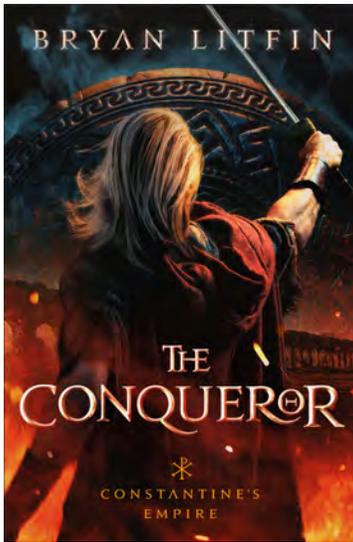
Book two is already written and ready to be edited for release in October 2021. That one is, I think, the most “swashbuckling” of the three. Lots of chasing and adventures and travel.

Now I am working on book three. That’s the one with the Council of Nicaea plotline and the mother of Constantine Helena founding the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, which is still in Jerusalem’s Old City today. (Or at least, the Crusader version of it is there.)

I’m going to grapple with some big-time theological issues that were worked out then and we still hold today. It’s going to be a great finish to the saga! **FF**

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The Conqueror

Constantine's Empire #1

Bryan Litfin

Revell

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Travel back to one of the most pivotal eras in history—a time when devotion to the pagan gods was fading and the Roman Empire was being conquered by the sign of the cross.

AD 309. Rome teeters on the brink of war. Constantine's army is on the move. On the Rhine frontier, pagan Germanic barbarian Brandulf Rex joins the Roman army as a spy. Down in Rome, senator's daughter Junia Flavia finds herself embroiled in anti-Christian politics as she works on behalf of the church.

As armies converge and forces beyond their control threaten to destroy everything they have worked for, these two people from different worlds will have to fight together to bring down the evil Emperor Maxentius. But his villainous plans and devious henchmen are not easily overcome.

Will Rex and Flavia live to see the Empire bow the knee to Christ? Or will their part in the story of Constantine's rise meet an untimely and brutal end?

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SPECULATIVE: SHAWN LAMB

TRADER OF ELDAR

Shawn Lamb is the author of multiple titles in Christian fiction ranging from age 8 to adult, as well as an event speaker. Since 2010, Shawn has participated in home-school conventions, book fairs, and festivals throughout the Southeast, Midwest and Mid-Atlantic regions.

Her latest book is *Trader of Eldar*.

No spoilers, but how does *Trader of Eldar* continue what you began in *Son of Eldar*? (Is this connected with your *Allon Series*—and if so, how?)

Trader of Eldar follows the continuing adventures of Nollen of Far Point, the owner of a remote trading post in The Doane, the southernmost Territory in Eldar. Three years have passed since *Son of Eldar*, and Nollen has matured into a young man of twenty-three. Still, the Six Territories are coming to grips with change, and Nollen plays a part in that transition.

However, an event in a neighboring country requires Nollen's particular skills and expertise. The difficulties and challenges will test him like never before. All the fantasy elements are present with talking creatures and such, but just like all my stories, faith and personal mettle is key.

As for the origin of the *Eldar Saga*, it came about after the completion of the *Allon Series* when my readers asked if I would write more fantasy books. Including *The Guardians of Allon*, *Allon*, and *The King's Children*, there are sixteen books in that series. In fact, my original intent was a single book for Allon, but my daughter, her friends, and readers wanted more. Just like Allon, "*Trader of Eldar*" is in response to readers want-

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ing another story. Whether Eldar comes close to the number of Allon, has yet to be seen

Tell us about the world of these books. How did you go about building this world?

For both Allon and Eldar, I use my love of history to world build. However, I wanted to make Eldar distinct from Allon. The Kingdom of Allon is a merger of Israel and Elizabethan England. I chose Elizabethan times because so much fantasy is in the Dark Ages, and I wanted gunpower for cannons yet still incorporate knights. Allon is divided into 12 provinces, has a Council of Twelve, and immortals and mortals living side-by-side. I use the Guardians (angel-like immortal characters) to highlight spiritual warfare. I began Allon when my daughter was 13 (she's now 32), and wanted to help young people visualize the Christian's spiritual battle, which is a concept hard to grasp.

With Eldar, I'm taking a different tact by being more interactive between various people groups. Eldar is divided into Six Territories. In Scripture, "6" is considered the number of man. There are four races; men, Ganel, Ha'tar, and Nefal. Each of these have their own culture, values, and creeds, thus make for tension within the kingdom. I use mythology and varied traditions to create distinctions, as well as conflict.

Of course, there are similarities readers will recognize among the groups, such giants, or elf-like in appearance. Readers—especially young adults—associate with characters who strike a chord, someone they can relate with. As such, I concentrate on character development. Personal interaction within the story also aids in dealing with issues of life. Weakness, strength,

fatal flaws, turning points, success, and failures are important. These aspects cross the demographics within Eldar.

Taken in totality, the most important aspect of story-telling is to make a solid foundation of the ordinary. This creates a basis, so that when the fantastic is introduced, it is common to that particular world. There is a logic to it based upon parameters.

3) What are the challenges of creating a fantastical world while still telling stories grounded in biblical truth?

Tolkien and Lewis were inspirational, as they wove history, culture, mythology, and faith in such ways as to create believable worlds and stories. Yet, the most helpful, was Our Lord Himself. Jesus told profound parables without crossing the line into unacceptable and inappropriate.

Since I started writing for my daughter, I pray every time I sit down to compose. I ask for guidance on the spiritual themes and principles to include. In the forefront of my mind is the thought of what is acceptable to God. Just because I write fiction doesn't mean spiritual principles go out the window. The Bible makes no distinction between real and make-believe. Stories, parable, and allegories are merely a way to convey Truth. Thus, I strive to keep a clear conscience before God by using Scripture as a governor on what I write.

4) What spiritual theme or themes can be found in *Trader of Eldar*?

Perseverance in the face of danger and evil is a main theme. Scripture continually speaks about "perseverance of the Saints", and how Christians must cling to faith against all odds. Trust is another issue. There are things Nollen didn't completely

deal with in *Son of Eldar*. He faces tests and situations that cause him to make difficult choices. If the ultimate sacrifice is required, can he face it? Will he falter to the demise of others or step out in faith? Can he serve God, the king, and maintain integrity? Also, included is the principle of “iron sharpening iron” between characters. The fantasy elements help to propel these aspects, but the foundation of a good story is personal conflict, challenges of faith, and overcoming obstacles. This is what stays with a reader beyond the extraordinary.

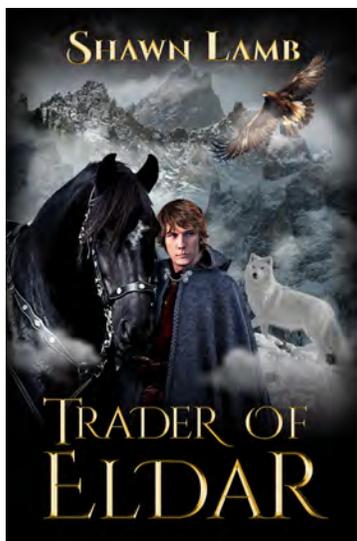
5) What is it about storytelling that makes it such a powerful vehicle for truth?

Jesus’ parables showed that by taking an individual outside of themselves to another viewpoint, it penetrates in a way that self-introspection doesn’t. Story-telling has been a classic method to instill values, pass on traditions, and illustrate concepts since the beginning. When guided by biblical principles, the impact can be profound.

Words are powerful, and Scripture reminds us of how our words can influence people for good or ill. As an author, I must stay true to THE Word, for my words to have the desired effect of good. I can’t control what happens once a story is out, but I can control my intent and clear conscience before God while writing. That is all any of us can do—is be faithful to God in doing the task He has laid out for us. The outcome is in His hands, and I always pray for the positive. **FF**

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Trader of Eldar

Eldar Saga #2

Shawn Lamb

Allon Books

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AMISH: JENNIFER BECKSTRAND

AMISH CHRISTMAS MIRACLES

Jennifer Beckstrand is a two-time RITA-nominated, a #1 Amazon bestselling Amish romance author of *The Matchmakers of Huckleberry Hill Series*, *The Honeybee Sisters Series*, and *The Petersheim Brothers Series* for Kensington Books. She has always been drawn to the strong faith and the enduring family ties of the Plain people and loves writing about them. Jennifer has written 22 Amish romances, an historical western, and the nonfiction book, *Big Ideas*.

Her latest book is ***Amish Christmas Miracles***.

What inspired the story in your novel?

I love Christmas stories, and what could be better than an Amish Christmas miracle? I have teamed up with 13 other Amish fiction authors to give our readers a gift of heartwarming Christmas stories perfect to read while curled up by the fire. For my story in the collection, *A Peanut Butter Christmas*, twins Alfie and Benji Petersheim try to make a Christmas miracle for Mary Yutzy and Jerry Zimmerman. My story was inspired by the hope of Christmas, the good news that the birth of a baby in Bethlehem means that we all get a second chance.

What were your goals writing this novel?

The past seven months have been difficult for all of us. The goal of all the writers in this collection is to give our readers something to smile about, someone to laugh with, and a reason to fall in love. We hope our stories will kindle readers' faith in a brighter future and remind them of the happiness that is still so plentiful all around us.

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What do you want readers to take away after reading *A Peanut Butter Christmas*?

A Peanut Butter Christmas is a story of second chances, forgiveness, and discovering the plans God has for us. Jerry is torn between his love for Mary and his calling from God. I hope my readers will see themselves in the struggles surrounding faith, family, and love. We all have flaws and weaknesses, but as we turn to God, He will show us a way through.

What's an example of how your storytelling is impacted by your Christian faith?

My faith is everything to me, and I hope that faith shines through all my books. If we let Him, God will shape our lives and guide our paths for His purposes and glory. The characters in my books learn this lesson in many different ways. I love exploring forgiveness, second chances, kindness, and belief.

How do you approach writing about the plain people in a way that's accurate to their way of life?

One thing that struck me the first time I visited an Amish home was that the Amish are just “regular” people with many of the same hopes and dreams and aspirations that Englishers have. They want what is best for their families, they worry over their children, they strive to be better disciples of the Savior. I try to make my Amish characters real, because that is how I see the Amish. I've done extensive research to make my books authentic, but I also believe that the most authentic thing I can do is to write the Amish as real people—good, kind, and honest, but also flawed and struggling like the rest of us.

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Amish Christmas Miracles

A Peanut Butter Christmas

Jennifer Beckstrand

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ROMANCE: GEORGIA CURTIS LING

THE ORNAMENT OF HOPE

Georgia Curtis Ling is the bestselling author of *What's in the Bible for Women*, an award-winning writer, and a well-liked speaker who touches the heart and tickles the funny bone as she writes about faith, love and life. Over her career her work has appeared in numerous periodicals, and nine best-selling books, including the *God's Vitamin "C" for the Spirit Series*, *God's Abundance*, and *God's Unexpected Blessings*. Her debut Christmas romance novel, ***The Ornament of Hope*** is rich with voices from the past, memories of heartwarming stories and traditions of her cherished heritage.

What inspired the story in your novel?

I was born and raised in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, I hold dear the three inherent mountain values of faith, family, and the land. My debut faith influenced Christmas romance novel, *The Ornament of Hope*, is rich with voices for the past, memories of heartwarming stories, folklore, and traditions of my cherished heritage.

When we relocated from Kentucky to Jonesborough, Tennessee to be near our family, on our first drive down Main Street I fell in love with this quaint little historic town and thought it would be a perfect setting for a movie or book. Jonesborough is the inspiration for the fictional town, Spring Valley, a charming artsy Appalachian town. I'm a huge fan of Hallmark Christmas movies and had been tossing around in my head the story line.

I wanted to go deeper with the struggles and journey of loss with Shauna and Gabe, so it's not all candy canes and lollypops. It's a contemporary love story set against the struggles of the

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Appalachian region and the internal emotional struggles of moving beyond loss with Shauna and Gabe.

What were your goals writing this novel?

With the year of the COVID pandemic I wanted to offer a story where we can find hope when life seems dark and how sometimes in loss, you discover love.

No matter what I write, non-fiction or fiction, I gently point readers to Scripture and weave timeless advice through the pages. God is concerned with your living your best possible life. My goal is always helping readers discover meaning and purpose in your life and help make sense of uncertain times, suffering, and loss. The Word of God offers hope when a crisis hits, comfort in time of grief, encouragement when you are weary, and guidance in relationships. Readers will find love in the whispers of hope in *The Ornament of Hope*.

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What do you want readers to take away after reading *The Ornament of Hope*?

The Ornament of Hope is definitely a heartwarming, feel-good Christmas read but also has the main characters dealing with underlying deep struggles and loss that I think we can relate to in our daily life. In our own struggles we can choose joy and cling to hope.

What's an example of how your storytelling is impacted by your Christian faith?

The Word of God offers hope when a crisis hits, comfort in time of grief, encouragement when you are weary, and guidance in relationships. Readers will find inspiration and love in the whispers of hope in *The Ornament of Hope*.

What do you consider the essential qualities of a leading lady and a leading man in your fiction?

Both the leading lady, Shauna, and the leading man, Gabe, are on the journey of healing from tremendous loss. Following the advice of her therapist, Shauna Murphy left her dream career and nightmare life behind in the big city. She made the dreaded trip home for the holidays to spend time with her family and reconnect with her heritage. Nestled in the shadow of the Appalachian Mountains, her hometown enveloped her like a cozy quilt—wrapped her in comfort to calm and heal her hurts. During her trauma Shauna clung to the encouragement of Scripture to be strong and courageous but finds it overwhelming at times to move beyond her loss. She pushes through her fears and trauma and gains strength from her beloved Gran's whispers of hope.

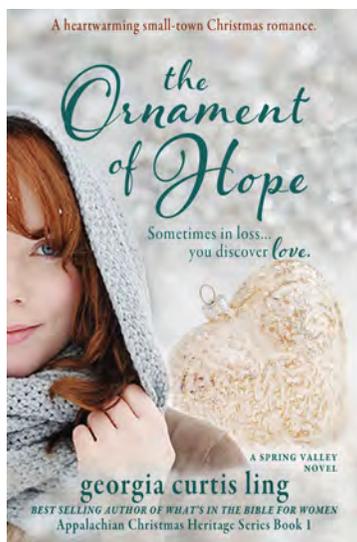
When Gabe Anderson, a Northerner, moved to the South with his new bride to manage her family's historic inn, he never imagined in a few short years he would be a widower, living alone in Spring Valley. After his tragic loss, just when Gabe began living again, he suffers another life altering event that leaves him questioning his future and purpose. An avid hiker, he finds solace in the mounts—his refuge, his sanctuary where he met God.

Both Shauna and Gabe realize they have to let go of fear to find hope as together they begin their wish granting mission for The Giving tree to help provide assistance to struggling families in need. Along the journey they find an ordinary Christmas ornament is an extraordinary symbol of the hope, love, and joy to be found in giving.

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Georgia Curtis Ling — *The Ornament of Hope*



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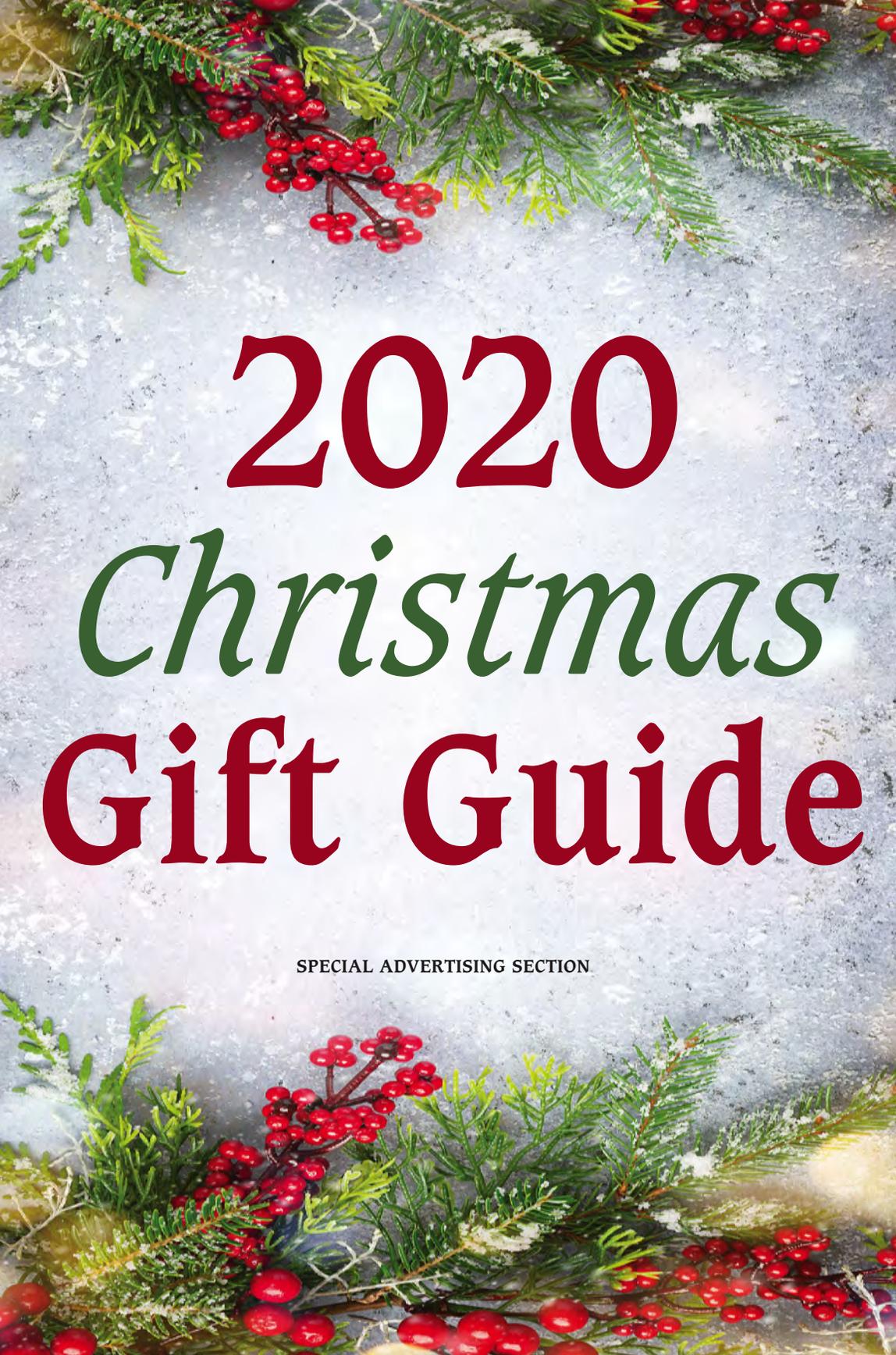
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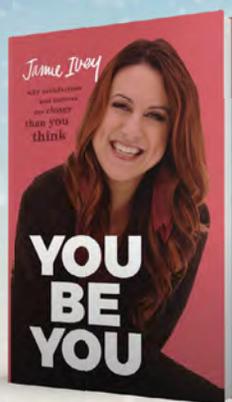
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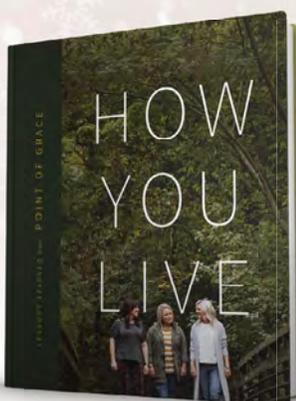
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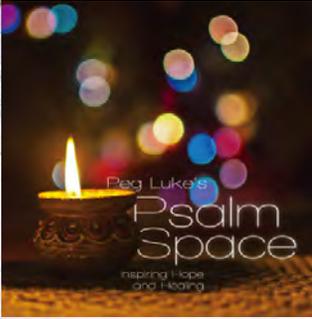


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PSALM SPACE

Peg Luke

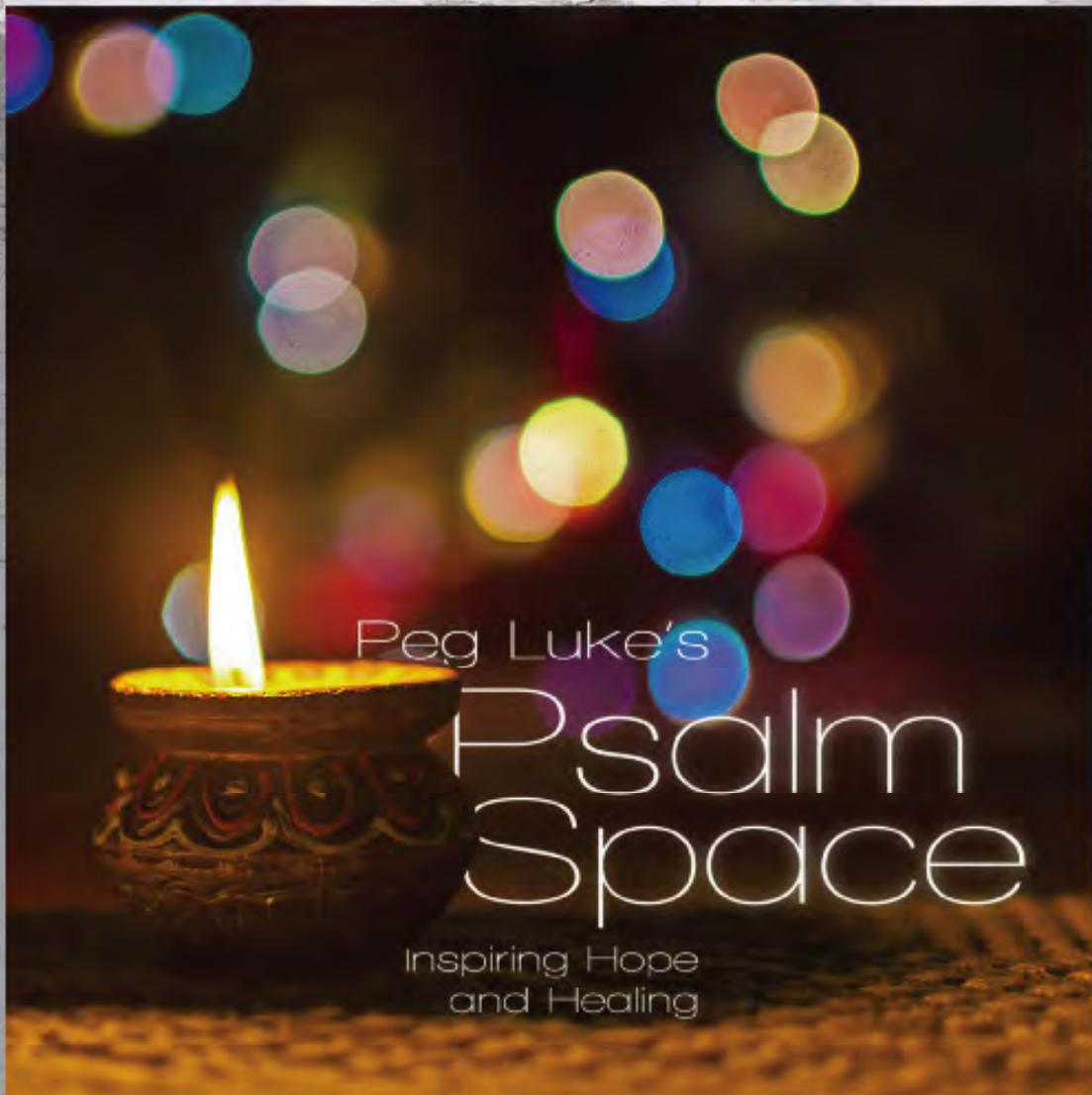
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The writing team of **Cindy Woodsmall** and daughter-in-law **Erin Woodsmall** have co-authored several books. Cindy Woodsmall is a *New York Times* and CBA best-selling author whose writing has been featured on *ABC's Nightline* and the front page of the *Wall Street Journal*.



Erin Woodsmall has edited, brainstormed, and researched books with Cindy for almost a decade. In their collaboration ***The English Daughter*** (WaterBrook), a marriage is tested in this Old Order Amish novel of longing for renewed love and a path for forgiveness.

In this exclusive interview with Cindy and Erin, we find out what inspired this novel, how some Amish districts accommodate technology, and what they hope readers will take away after having read their book.

What inspired the story in *The English Daughter*?

Cindy: Love, a bit of understanding marriage, and Facebook readers inspired this story. Love is everything. God is love. Everything good in our lives was born out of love. Marriage can be a renewable source of love.

The key words in the previous sentence is “can be.” Marriage is capable. But each spouse has to be willing to change with the times, be open to the scary aspects of that change, and be willing to sacrifice for each other. If only one spouse is doing those things, it eventually breeds resentment and contempt, which is about as far from unconditional love as one can get.

Because the phrase “unconditional love” is often used to excuse bad behavior, I feel the need to clarify that—it doesn’t mean unconditional acceptance of behavior. I think Proverbs 27:17 sums it up well: As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

While pondering on these things, I wondered if readers would want a story about a young married couple with several children, so I polled my Facebook readers, asking if they preferred a new romance or a marriage-in-trouble story. Hands down, they voted for a story of a marriage in trouble.

Their response and enthusiasm lit a fire in my heart. This novel also has a new romance...because I couldn’t resist having one of those also.

Erin: This story started from imagining of one of the worst situations a married couple could be in: a hopeless, broken, shell of what was once a healthy relationship. Very early in the writing process, Cindy shared the opening chapters of her working synopsis and I remember thinking “Wow, are Jemima and Roy ever going to work this out?”

But at the same time, we knew the goal was to have a slow-burn romance and bring the couple back from the brink. We also wrote of fresh, young love between Abigail, who is Roy’s younger sister, and Chris, the new and mysterious Amish man in town.

The Amish are so well-known as “Plain People.” Are there really Amish now who are comfortable using cell phones?

Cindy: Let me back up a bit to answer that. An Amish district most often consists of 25 to 45 households. Each district has a preacher, deacon, and bishop, although the bishop usually covers

more than one district, and each man also preaches during the every-other Sunday service.

There are about two thousand Amish districts in the US, so how a district feels about cell phones varies according to the strictness of the ministers' stances and the business needs of those in their district. I have stayed in an Amish home that was very strict about not having cell phones, and I've stayed in a home that was much more relaxed about it.

The setting for *The Englisch Daughter* is the (mythical) town of Mirth, which is just outside of Lancaster. The bishop's stance on phones is based on a conversation I had with an Amish man a few years ago. The bishop in Mirth gives his people a lot of room concerning cell phones, knowing that cell phones are often the difference between a small business thriving or going under, especially when that business is similar to Roy's horse farm and isn't run from an office.

Erin: Added to what Cindy said, there's also the technicality of Old Order Amish homes not being connected to the world via wires. For years, certain districts have allowed Amish families to have phone shanties on their properties. They're allowed to have refrigerators—connected to generators or propane instead of the power grid.

We saw children playing wireless Nintendo DS systems while visiting Amish country a decade ago. Seeing it through that logic, cell phones aren't a far stretch.

As Cindy said, many bishops are all about trying to make certain aspects of life easier for their flock. Cell phones are a necessity

for some small businesses, therefore certain bishops will show leniency on this in order to help those family businesses succeed.

What was it about Jemima and Roy's relationship that made you want to tell their story?

Cindy: I love a good romantic story, and what better way to dive deep into romantic love than to begin at a point of broken love, a place that only true love (and God) can redeem. When I begin writing, I'm never certain of the outcome of the story, so I wanted to go on that journey and see what became of the couple who once adored each other. Could they find love and each other?

Roy did a few things along the way that I didn't expect. One is something foreign to the Amish: he frees her.

Erin: I was drawn to the juicy, scandalous details of Roy's lies and mess ups! It's by far our story with the most twists of secrets happening in a relationship.

Which character surprised you the most when you wrote *The English Daughter*?

Cindy: My heart identifies with Roy. I've seen his heart in the heart of many people. He longs with all that is in him to make things right, and yet he clings to secrets as if they can save him and his wife.

Despite that some of his behavior says otherwise, he loves his wife deeply. Is that enough? Does he love another more?

Erin: I have to agree that Roy surprised me too. At first, I wasn't a fan, even as I was writing his chapters early on in the book. All the lies ... ignoring his family so he could pull out his cell phone. Ugh!

But as the story continues, we can really see that Roy is doing his best while being in several no-win situations. He comes through for his Englisch daughter, putting everything on the line for her: his business, his dignity. He sees her as precious, worthy, and irreplaceable. Isn't that what Christ does for us?

For all of Roy's early selfishness, he learns, grows, and changes, finally seeing his wife's needs. Needless to say, now I love Roy's character.

What would you like your readers to take away after having read *The Englisch Daughter*?

Cindy: Love covers a multitude of sin. Stress uncovers a multitude of sins. When it's all said and done, despite that we fail each other, we also redeem each other.

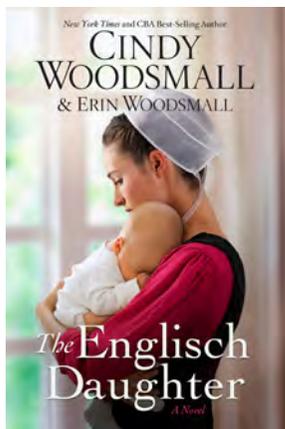
Erin: There can be great passion and love in the longest of long-term relationships, but like a plant, we have to water and feed them. Resentment and lies will cause marriages to wither, and the greatest way we can grow our marriages is by living Jesus's example and by the words in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 (verses that were included in many wedding sermons, including mine): Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. **FF**

Visit Cindy Woodsmall's author page here:

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The Englisch Daughter

Cindy Woodsmall and Erin Woodsmall
WaterBrook Press



To discover more Amish books, CLICK here:

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Historical | Lori Benton

Lori Benton's historical novels transport readers to the 18th century, where she brings to life the colonial and early federal periods of American history. Her books have received the **Christy Award**, the **Inspy Award**, and been finalists for the **ECPA Book of the Year**. Lori's latest release, ***Mountain Laurel*** (Tyndale House), centers on 18th century slavery and how different characters respond to its injustice.



In this interview, the author compares and contrasts the new novel with her previous works, reveals the research that went into it, and shares some surprising details about the next book in the series.

How is *Mountain Laurel* different from your previous books? What made you want to write about this specific setting and situation?

Mountain Laurel bears the strongest connection to my 2019 release, *The King's Mercy*. Both tackle issues of slavery, freedom, injustice, and what it means to be family—the family we're born to and the family we choose.

The rest of my previously published books have been set on the eighteenth-century frontier and deal with the collision of world-views between Native Americans and European settlers. But in all my books you'll find characters who have, willingly or not, crossed a line between cultures and find themselves irrevocably changed by the experience.



How I came to be writing about *Mountain Laurel's* specific setting and situation is a mixture of the profound and the playful. The profound has to do with a book called *Drums of Autumn* by Diana Gabaldon. A minor character in that book, a slave called Josh, spoke with a Scottish accent though his ancestry was African. Josh had grown up hearing the speech of his Scottish owners, so that's who he sounded like.

With this minor character, Diana broadened my understanding of how the unique circumstances of our upbringing help create who we become. We're born with DNA that links us to a people group, but extraordinary influences can instill in us unique qualities not all in that group share.

Fascinated with the idea of creating such a character, I asked myself a string of what-if questions, which led to the characters of Malcolm, Lily, and Seona. I chose North Carolina for a setting because of all the Southern states, I'm most familiar with that one.

But when did I want this book to be set? The Revolutionary War movie *The Patriot* settled that. I fancied the look of the knee

breeches the male characters wore. After learning when they went out of style (and not wanting to write about a war), I narrowed the time frame to between 1784 and 1800. I randomly picked 1793—a fortuitous choice, as readers of the book will discover.

What kind of research did you do to inform this book?

I initially researched and wrote *Mountain Laurel* from 2004 to 2009. Because *Mountain Laurel* was the first eighteenth-century-set book I'd ever written, I came to it largely ignorant of the time period. I had a considerable amount of research to do to make the world of these characters come alive with any hope of verisimilitude.

Having written and published six other eighteenth-century-set novels, the research for each built on the knowledge I acquired writing *Mountain Laurel*. That early research consisted of reading hundreds of books on topics ranging from eighteenth-century practical life (what they wore, ate, lived in, did for work and play), the history of colonial America and that of North Carolina, to more specialized topics like plantation economy, North Carolina's slave laws, the beginnings of the Underground Railroad, Eli Whitney's cotton gin, eighteenth-century thoroughbred breeding, the Scottish Jacobite Rising, how to construct a dovetail joint, treat malaria, and fire a black powder rifle.

I talked to an acquaintance who had been stalked by a mountain lion. I watched every YouTube video and documentary on the eighteenth century I could get my hands on, spent thousands of hours online, and took a memorable road trip through western North Carolina with the express purpose of reacquainting myself with a landscape last seen as a teenager. In other words, I

immersed myself in the eighteenth century for five years, a process that continues.

What did you learn from writing *Mountain Laurel*?

Besides having to learn about chattel slavery and everything else touched on in this story, I learned a great deal personally through writing *Mountain Laurel*. In 1999, nine years into my writing journey, I was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma and spent that year being treated. I was pronounced in remission by year's end, when I presumed I'd pick up where I left off with the novel I'd been writing at the time of my diagnosis, only to find myself suffering an unexpected side effect of chemotherapy—chemo fog. I simply couldn't meet the mental demands of novel writing.

In those days, my identity was wrapped up in being a writer. That had been stripped away, leaving me unsure who I was anymore, what I should be doing. Eventually I stopped spinning my mental and emotional wheels trying to get back what I'd lost and surrendered my passion for writing and the hope of being published. "Thy will be done" was my prayer and incidentally is a theme woven throughout *Mountain Laurel*.

Not until April 2004, with a vague notion of a story set during the 1700s, did I feel that old passion stirring in me again. But could I do it? Not just write a novel, but give myself what amounted to a history degree?

God was asking me to take a leap of faith, trust Him for healing, and begin. I did and along the way learned that God's plans for me are good, but His timing is His own. I learned that writing must never again become an idol. I must hold it with an open hand.

I learned how to lean into Him daily for the clarity to write. My mind will never be as sharp as it was before chemotherapy, but in my weakness, He has shown His strength repeatedly.

What is your hope for readers of this novel?

Here's a wonderful thing I've discovered over the years about celebrating the grace and redemptive power of Jesus Christ in the form of story. While I've had my conversation with the Lord about these characters and the themes I've explored with them, heard from Him and changed and grown in the writing, after the book is published, it becomes the reader's turn.

It still amazes me how God can speak to each reader's heart something unique. Whatever that turns out to be, my hope is that readers are drawn closer to the Lord through Seona and Ian's story, and that they turn that last page of *Mountain Laurel* more in love with our gracious Jesus than when they began.

What can we expect from future books in the *Kindred Series*?

Shiloh is the title of *Mountain Laurel's* sequel, but it also happens to be a sequel to another novel of mine, *Burning Sky*.

While I've received requests from readers to write more of their favorite character's story, no character has been the subject of more such requests than the Mohawk warrior Joseph Tames-His-Horse, introduced in *Burning Sky*. At last, I've found the way to grant that request.

While *Shiloh* is primarily the second half of Ian and Seona's story, Joseph plays a significant role in it. If you haven't met Joseph Tames-His-Horse, for the sake of his obviously compelling story

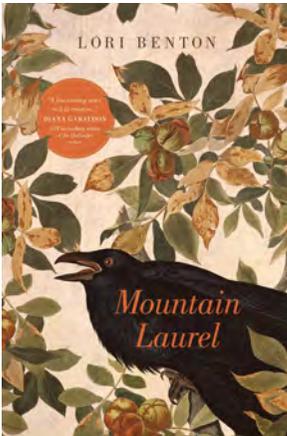
Lori Benton — *Mountain Laurel*

having the greatest impact, I recommend reading *Burning Sky* before *Shiloh* releases in 2021.

Readers will also encounter other characters from *Burning Sky*, twelve years beyond the point that novel ended. Such tangled webs are bound to be woven when an author lets her characters wander from book to book, as I have freely done. **FF**

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Mountain Laurel
Kindred Series #1
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Kristen Young has published a number of books, beginning with *The Survival Guide* devotions for teens. What if? *Dealing with Doubt* is a book for young people struggling with doubts about God, Jesus, or faith.



In more recent years, she's been writing fiction. **Apprentice** (Enclave Escape) is the first book in the *Collective Underground Trilogy*.

In this exclusive interview, the author talks about the book's main character, the inspiration behind the story, and the spiritual themes woven through *Apprentice*.

Who is Apprentice Flick?

Apprentice Flick is a girl with the kind of ability I would love to have: she has a perfect memory. But that makes her a bit of a misfit in her Nursery Dorm. She is called "Memory Freak" by her classmates, and treated with suspicion. So she really wants to escape her situation and move to Elite Academy, where she thinks she'll be more welcome. But some troubling things start to happen to her, and pretty soon she's got a lot more to worry about.

What is the Love Collective?

In the fictional world in which this story is set, the Love Collective desires to create a well-ordered society, and so it is absolutely essential in their eyes to weed out the Haters. They use technology to help them achieve this.



What inspired your story in *Apprentice*?

A couple of things. I loved *Brave New World*, *The Hunger Games* and other dystopian fiction, so I wanted to try and write one for myself.

One of the things I've noticed about totalitarian governments is the way they control language. Not just in their propaganda, but in the definitions they use. Nazi Germany, for example, didn't just proclaim to the world that they were going to kill millions of Jewish people and other population groups. They gave it a euphemistic name and built a carefully controlled narrative around the supremacy of one race over another.

Language was a huge weapon in this situation. It hid the truth. It told a story that brought large swathes of the nation onboard

with their program, and it guided the news that was being shared so that large numbers of people could claim ignorance to what was happening.

The other, lesser inspiration was the fact that I keep forgetting things, and so it was very tempting to write a main character who always remembered everything.

How does this volume fit into the larger *Collective Underground Series*?

This is the introduction to Apprentice Flick's life. Without sharing spoilers, she's at the beginning of a journey that's going to show her a whole new world, while revealing some things about her current life that are a little more sinister than she ever realized.

What spiritual themes are you exploring in this story, and what would you like readers to take away after having read *Apprentice*?

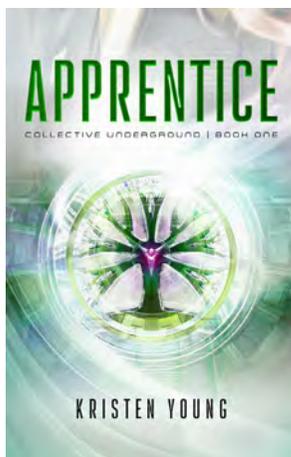
I'm exploring lots of themes in this trilogy. The first book raises a few big questions: what *is* love? What does it mean to love someone? What is friendship? What is redemption? Where does our identity come from?

Flick is at the beginning of her journey of awakening in this book, so there are more spiritual themes to follow in later books, too. I'd love readers to come away from *Apprentice* with a deep desire to keep following Flick's journey. **FF**

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Kristen Young — *Apprentice*



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Davis Bunn is the award-winning author of numerous national bestsellers, with sales totaling more than 8 million copies. His work has been published in 20 languages, and his critical acclaim includes four **Christy Awards** for excellence in fiction. His latest book is the surprising suspense novel ***Burden of Proof*** (Revell). The one thing Ethan needs is a second chance. As he enters into his own past, will he discover a means to redeem the future?



In this interview, Davis shares some behind-the-scenes details, the F. Scott Fitzgerald story that inspired him, and the importance of letting go of the past and moving on.

Can you briefly describe *Burden of Proof*?

Ethan Barrett mysteriously enters his own past and discovers a means of redeeming his future. His unexpected journey toward closure becomes one toward openness—but at an unfathomable cost.

Ethan has replayed the scenes in his mind a thousand times. He has long sensed a disconnect between the man he should have been and the one he had become.

The heartrending shift started one summer morning, in a surfing contest he should have won—along with the prize money, the accolades, and the girl. But losing the competition was nothing compared to the coming tragedy. Three weeks later Ethan missed the chance to save his brother's life.



The lost opportunity still frames his life, even after thirty-five years. It seems to Ethan that his existence plays out a beat too slow. Until he is granted the impossible and has a chance to relive that dreadful day.

The further he becomes involved in this new life, the clearer one truth becomes above all else: no matter how many times he is given to live anew, he risks becoming trapped by the same errors and failings that marred his previous life.

The more intensely he struggles, the more vividly he realizes that he cannot find his own way through and be the man he wants to be. A good husband. An honest and caring individual. Someone who is worthy of the trust and love of others.

Can Ethan escape this double-edged existence and become the hero, just for this one day?

What was the inspiration behind *Burden of Proof*?

When I first started writing, I found myself both challenged and disappointed by the works of F. Scott Fitzgerald. My favorite of his was *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*. Over the years I found myself rewriting the story's ending and inserting a theme of hope and reconciliation, a higher purpose to Benjamin's strange existence. That is what I sought to do here.

Your two main characters, Ethan Barrett and Sonya Barrett, Ethan's sister-in-law, have a strained relationship. What events help mend their feelings for each other?

Ethan comes face-to-face with how his own life choices have strained relationships with those closest to him. Until he was able to step back from everything that had come before, he could not see his brother's wife for who she truly was. The freedom coming from this act, this difficult and threatening act, was exquisite.

Your novel is set in several cities within Florida.

Why did you choose these locations?

From the first sketches I made for this book, Cocoa Beach and Jacksonville played a pivotal role. *Burden of Proof* takes place in the mid-eighties, when these two cities underwent drastic transformations. Cocoa Beach played a pivotal role in NASA's development. And Jacksonville basically reinvented itself, going from a sleepy southern backwater to a vibrant industrial and technology hub, with one of the nation's youngest median ages.

***Burden of Proof* has the underlying themes of forgiveness and letting go of the past. What do you hope readers can learn from those themes?**

So much of life is shaped not by past events but rather by the way we perceive them and what emotional baggage we carry.

These burdens become forces that can shape our futures if we let them.

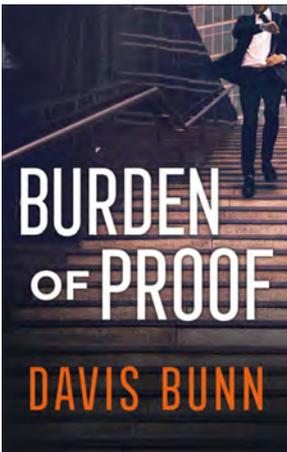
It is possible to let go and move on, but only if we recognize our need to ask for divine help. Only then can we unclench our fists and release the chains that bind us to our own past.

You've stated that your book delivers "a challenge to perspectives regarding life choices." What do you mean by this statement?

Do we focus too much on the wrongs, the hurts, the missed opportunities? Are we able to learn, forgive, and move on? Will we allow God to heal? These are the questions *Burden of Proof* seeks to ask and then answer. **FF**

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Burden of Proof

Davis Bunn

Revell



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Pepper Basham writes romances peppered with grace and humor with a southern Appalachian flair. Her books have garnered recognition in the *Grace Awards*, *Inpsys*, and the *ACFW Carol Awards*.



Her latest title mixes true crime, history, and romance as part of the multiple-author *True Colors Series*. In ***The Red Ribbon*** (Barbour Books), Ava Burcham tends to court trouble. But when her curiosity leads her into a feud between an Appalachian clan and the local authorities, her amateur sleuthing propels her into a world of criminal cover-ups, political rivalries, and a battle of wills. The end result? The Hillsville Courthouse Massacre of 1912.

In this interview, Pepper explains the historical facts behind the story, the spiritual theme of the novel, and what she hopes readers get out of *The Red Ribbon*.

What can you tell us about your protagonist, Ava Burcham?

Ava is a spunky, headstrong young woman who ends up getting herself into trouble because she wants to help people. Her family history is tragic and she became an orphan at a young age after watching her parents and younger brother die.

A bootlegging incident gone wrong is what led to her daddy's death. Ava has a big heart for the truth and for righting wrongs but a lot of insecurities, due to her past, but her passion, kindness, and smarts are what make her endearing.



What did you find to be the most challenging part in your research—the time period, or the massacre itself?

The massacre! I had the unique opportunity to write a book that took place in my hometown about an event that still reverberates through parts of the community, even today. Navigating the lingering wounds of this crime and still being true to the story was probably the most difficult part of writing this book.

I wanted to do justice to my community, my Appalachian heritage, and to the people whose ancestors experienced this very real tragedy.

This is a novel with a true crime at the root of it. How do you balance historical fact against making a better story; is there additional pressure because there's a “true crime” involved?

YES! There's a timeline to follow!! LOL.

Plus, there's the element of the "unknown" about certain aspects of this true crime that you want to make sure are organic to the story without stamping too much of my opinion on history. I did reduce the historical timeline to make it a better story because the real events happen over a year from each other. This tightened the story.

For me, the biggest pressure came from trying to make sure I respected both the history, the culture, and the reader to combine everything in a way that created a good, cohesive, interesting, and (as much as possible) true story.

What spiritual theme did you explore in *The Red Ribbon*?

I loved getting to delve into the idea of identity. How we define ourselves? What we choose to use to create our identity and how that definition shapes our perspective, our choices, and our peace of mind.

Ava struggles with finding her identity in Christ instead of in her broken family history, so this wrong definition creates a fear within her that keeps her from embracing what God has given her in the present.

What would you like your readers to take away after having read *The Red Ribbon*?

Well, I hope they enjoy the story and learn more about the Appalachian culture, but even deeper than that I hope they recognize that knowing who and Whose we are makes a world of difference on living free and joyfully in a broken world.

When we recognize we are loved beyond imagining, held completely secure, and believe in the assurance of God's control, it

gives us a freedom of heart, spirit, and mind to really step into who we truly are. When we know we are loved unconditionally and when we embrace who God says we are in His sight, we truly live and love authentically. I'm not there yet, but I certainly hope God is continuing to help me understand that truth more and more each day. **FF**

Visit Pepper Basham's author page here:

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The Red Ribbon
True Colors Series #8
Pepper Basham
Barbour Books



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As the daughter of missionaries, **Kara Swanson** spent her childhood running barefoot through the lush jungles of Papua New Guinea. Able to relate with characters dropped into a unique new world, she quickly fell in love with the fantasy genre.



Her fantasy novel *Dust* (Enclave Escape) is the first book in her *Heirs of Neverland Series*. In the book, a girl who fears her own destiny is on a collision course with the boy who never wanted to grow up. The truth behind this fairy tale is about to unravel everything Claire thought she knew about Peter Pan—and herself.

In this interview, Kara reveals what led her to reshape the Peter Pan story, her biggest challenge writing the novel, and which part of the process surprised her the most.

What inspired your exploration into the Peter Pan myths?

I've always loved the Peter Pan story, and several years ago a friend and I were discussing fairytale retellings and the lack of Peter Pan-centric ones. I remember telling her that from my perspective, I missed seeing a Peter Pan retelling that really focused in on Peter himself. That without that classic Peter, the story just didn't feel like a Pan story any longer.

Without Peter and his mischief and optimism, it was a story about a magical world and pirates...but lost some of the adventurous nostalgia. I also went on to tell my friend that if I wrote a Peter Pan retelling, I'd center it around a character of my own



creation, someone who would play off of Peter, a girl who was forced to grow up too fast and would collide with the boy who never did.

The more I tossed around ideas for this story, the more I realized I just had to try my hand at writing it, although even attempting that felt like a leap of faith.

What were your goals in writing *Dust*?

To capture Peter in all his wild, boyish glory—while also crafting a slightly older version of the character, and to push him to grow. I wanted to weave a whimsical story that was filled with adventure and whimsy, but also lots of raw heart. A reminder that even when there are shadows weighing us down, all it takes is a spark of light to lift your soul.

What was your biggest challenge in writing this story?

Capturing Peter well! Trying to give him a vibrant voice and do the original Barrie story justice as a foundation for my novel.

Tell us about your protagonist, Claire Kenton?

Claire is...us. Those of us who have seen far more of the pain and darkness of the world than we'd chose. Those of us who have lost something. Those of us who still need a reminder that faith and hope can lift our weary hearts, and that if we believe in something beyond us...anything is possible.

What part of the process of developing the *Heirs of Neverland Series* has surprised you the most?

Discovering just how much depth I was able to find as I got to know Peter as a character and dig deeper into him. And as some of my own heart was woven through this story, exploring themes of growth and loss, to discover that this little novel of mine resonated with readers in a way I could have only dreamed of. **FF**

Visit Kara Swanson's author page here:

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Kara Swanson — *Dust*



Dust

Heirs of Neverland #1

Kara Swanson

Enclave Escape



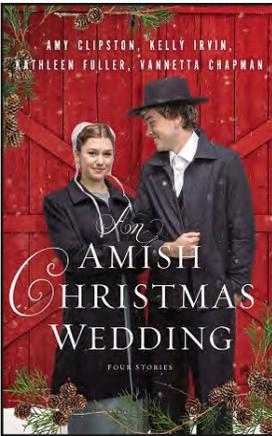
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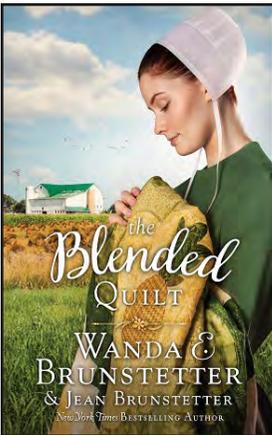
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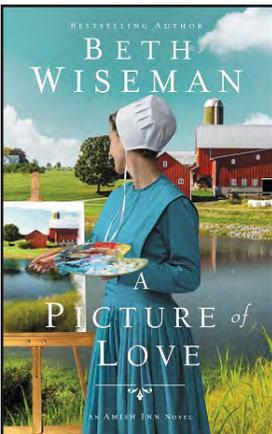
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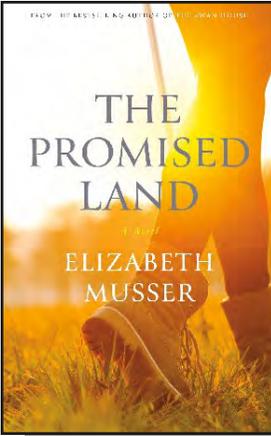
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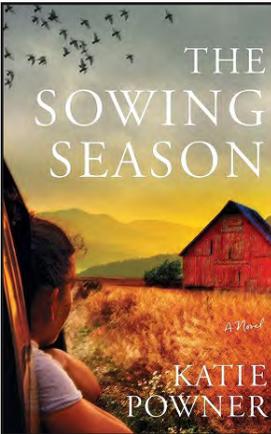
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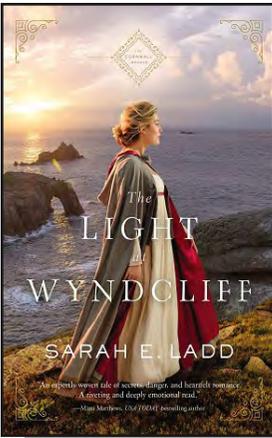
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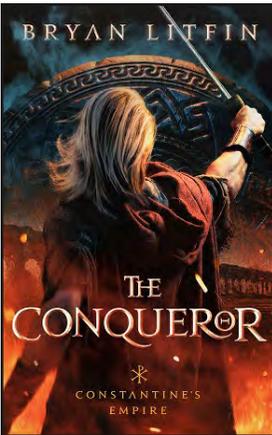
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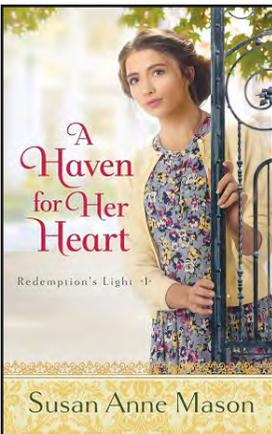
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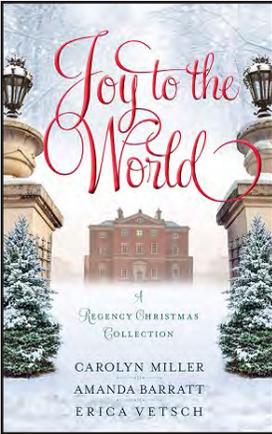
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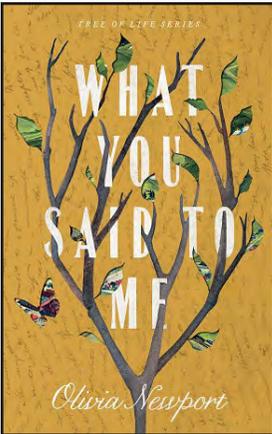
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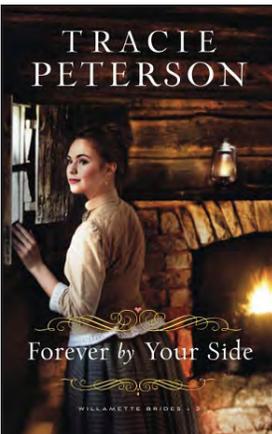
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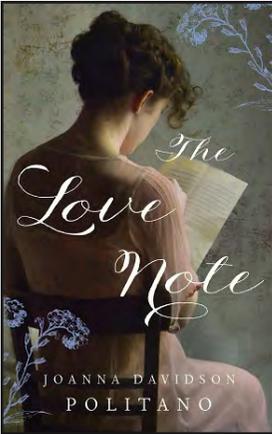
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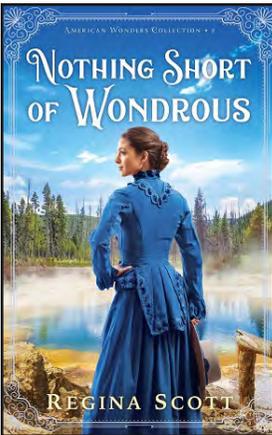
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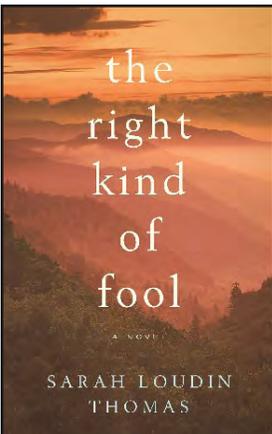
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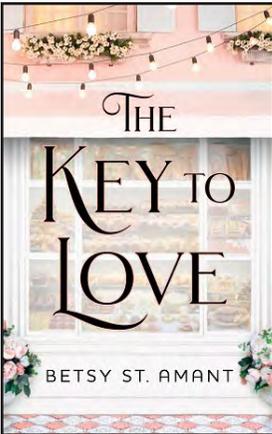
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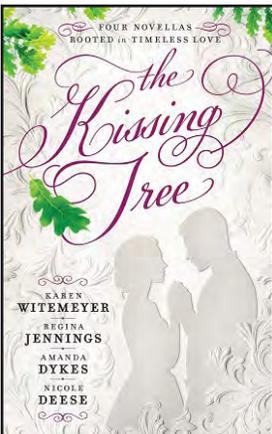
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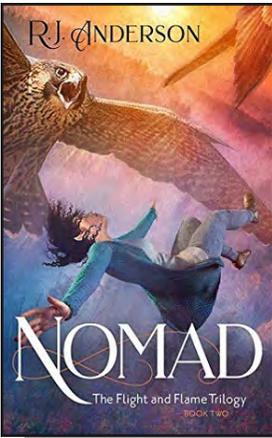
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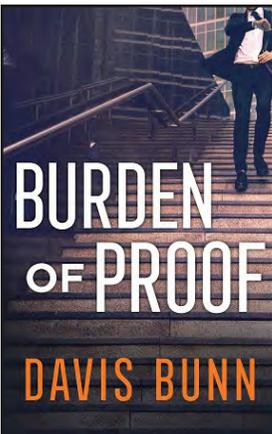
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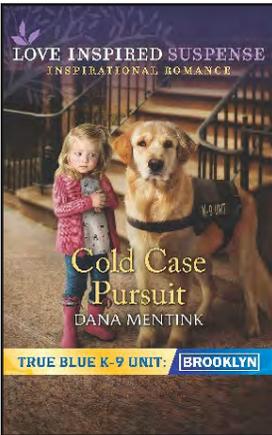
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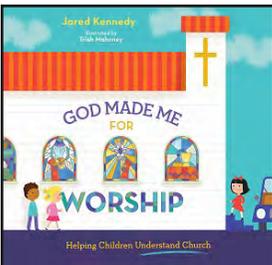
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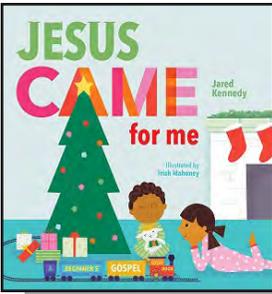
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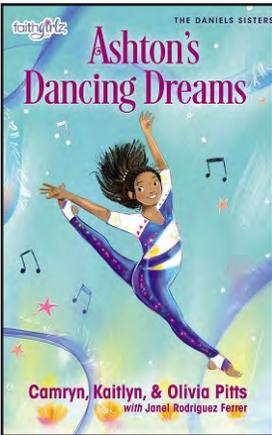
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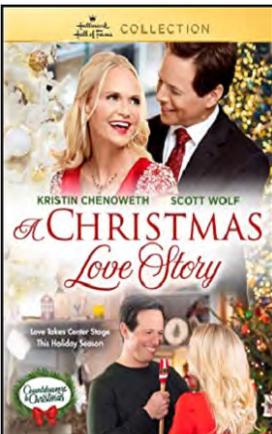
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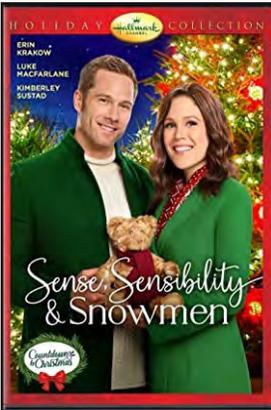
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