

FamilyFiction

December 2018

Christmas Author

WANDA E. BRUNSTETTER

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Quiz: How Well Do You Know A Charlie Brown Christmas?

How well do you know the perennial Christmas classic?

Read more here:

<https://www.familyfiction.com/quiz-well-know-charlie-brown-christmas>

Karen Kingsbury's *Two Weeks Coming* April 2019

A heart-wrenching new story in the Baxter Family series about a couple desperately waiting to bring their adopted child home and a young mother about to make the biggest decision of her life.

Read more here:

<https://www.familyfiction.com/karen-kingsburys-two-weeks-coming-april-2019>

Second Children's Book from Michael W. Smith, Mike Nawrocki

Let's Get Ready for Bed takes children on a journey through Sleepy Puppy's bedtime routine.

Read more here:

<https://www.familyfiction.com/second-childrens-book-michael-w-smith-mike-nawrocki>

War Room Producers Release Teaser for *Overcomer*

The 90-second teaser trailer shares the movie's theme of discovering who you are when everything you once valued is taken away.

Read more here:

<https://www.familyfiction.com/war-room-producers-release-teaser-overcomer>



Wanda E. Brunstetter

Celebrating the Season and Family

The author of ***A Christmas Prayer*** on her recent novels, and seeing her work come to life on the stage.

One of the founders of the Amish fiction genre, **Wanda E. Brunstetter's** books have sold more than 10 million copies. Her recent books include ***A Christmas Prayer*** (Shiloh Run Press), a historical romance; ***The Hope Jar*** (Shiloh Run Press), the first book in the **Prayer Jars** series; and the 3-in-1 collection ***The Daughters of Lancaster County*** (Barbour Books), which celebrates the recent stage adaptation of that series.

In this interview, Wanda explains why she enjoys writing Christmas stories, what readers can expect from the **Prayer Jars** series, and what it was like seeing her words up onstage.

***A Christmas Prayer* is a historical romance involving a cross-country journey in 1850. What inspired you to set the novel in this time and place?**

I enjoy history, especially around the time of the 1800s. Having driven over part of the Oregon Trail numerous times, I've done a good amount of research about the adventures and trials the pioneers heading west were faced with. I have asked myself many times what it must have been like for these brave people who gave up so much to begin a new life out west.

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Cynthia Cooper is traveling with the man she has promised to marry. But during the hard journey, she's having second thoughts—and two other fellow travelers have shown interest in her as well. What inspired this setup?

I've had a creative imagination since childhood. Ideas for storylines and scenes often pop into my head. This was one instance of that.

What about Cynthia made you want to tell her story?

A young woman who had recently lost her father, and is now engaged to a man almost twice her age, would no doubt experience a lot of confusion and inner conflict. Cynthia felt obligated to take care of her mother and thought the best way to do that was to marry a man who could provide well for both her and her mother. Although she did not love this older man, she was willing to sacrifice her own desires for the sake of her mother.

You've written a few Christmas novels now. What appeals to you most about writing a story set at Christmastime?

Christmas is a special time for my family, as well as many other people, I'm sure. I enjoy reading stories set around the holidays, and I hope my readers will enjoy this historical Christmas story too.

You recently launched the Prayer Jars trilogy, which revolves around the intriguing idea that different people are finding these buried jars with hidden messages that lead to complications. What inspired this intriguing setup?

The idea of a series involving prayer jars came from my editor. After mulling her concept around for a bit, I came up with a storyline that involved hidden jars and an Amish family whose lives were changed when they learned they had a granddaughter they knew nothing about.

How does the series work—do all the characters know each other, or where are all these jars buried?

Each of the characters who discover one or more jars knows the others who have also found jars. While each of the three books in the series revolves mainly around one of these young women, they all play a role in each of the books.

The three young women discuss with each other things about the jars they've found and try to figure out who wrote the Scriptures, quotes, and prayers found on the slips of paper inside the jars. It becomes a mystery of sorts.

The first book is *The Hope Jar*, which features a young woman who has become part of an Amish family under false pretenses. What inspired you to write a story with a twist like that?

This is another instance of my active imagination taking over. While thinking about the idea of someone finds hidden prayer jars, the character of Michelle came to mind.

I could visualize her at the bus station when the Amish couple showed up. Desperate to get out of her current situation, Michelle went along with it when Willis and Mary Ruth Lapp thought she was their granddaughter and invited her into their home.

No spoilers, but what can readers expect from the other *Prayer Jars* books?

In the second book, *The Forgiving Jar*, releasing in February 2019, the real Sara deals with some hurts from her past and decides whether to forgive or not. Sara must also decide if she should remain in Lancaster County with her grandparents or return to her home in New Jersey. Of course, there's a conflicting romance involved, which is something Sara must deal with in her story.

Book 3, *The Healing Jar*, which comes out in August 2019, is about Sara's Amish cousin, Lenore, and the struggles she faces regarding her grandfather's ill health. There is also a relationship with a man she believes she can't have, as well as one very special jar that unravels a mystery that's been hidden for too many years.

There's now a stage musical based on your *Daughters of Lancaster County* books. How did that come about? What part of the series is the focus of the musical?

After reading my *Daughters of Lancaster County* series, the producer of the Blue Gate Musicals contacted my publisher, saying they wished to write a musical play based on the concept of my series. While the play is presented a bit different from my books, the concept from all three stories was used to create a wonderful musical play made for the stage.

Were you involved at all in the adaptation? (Have you seen the show yet? Were you surprised by how it looked on stage?)

I was not involved in the adaptation, but I attended the musical play when it first opened in Shipshewana, Indiana, at the Blue Gate Theater in June of this year. I will also attend several performances at the Ohio Star Theater in Sugarcreek, Ohio, in September.

Since the Blue Gate Musicals adapted another one of my previous books (*The Half-Stitched Amish Quilting Club*) to produce a musical play, I was not surprised by how *Stolen* looked on stage. The music, acting, and choreography are wonderfully presented in both of those plays.

There's a new 3-in-1 edition that collects the *Daughters of Lancaster County* books together. How has this experience helped you reflect on your original series—or are you too focused on the next book(s) to really think about them?

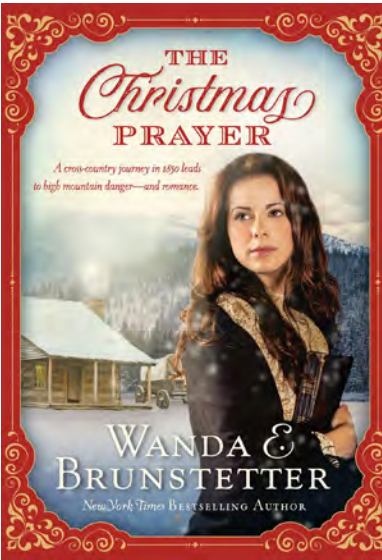
Having the series re-released has been fun for me. It helps me remember how much I enjoyed writing all three books in the series, and takes me back to Lancaster County, Pennsylvania,

Wanda E. Brunstetter

where the idea for the stories was born after my husband and I visited an Amish farm to buy homemade root beer. **FF**

Visit Wanda E. Brunstetter's author page here:

<https://www.familyfiction.com/authors/wanda-brunstetter>



A Christmas Prayer

Wanda E. Brunstetter
Shiloh Run Press

Bestselling Amish fiction author Wanda E. Brunstetter takes readers on a journey set in 1850 along the California Trail. A sudden snowstorm traps three wagons in the Sierra Nevada Mountains and forces Cynthia Cooper to evaluate the man she has promised to marry against two other worthy men in their party.

CLICK HERE TO READ MORE ONLINE: <https://www.familyfiction.com>

Wanda E. Brunstetter



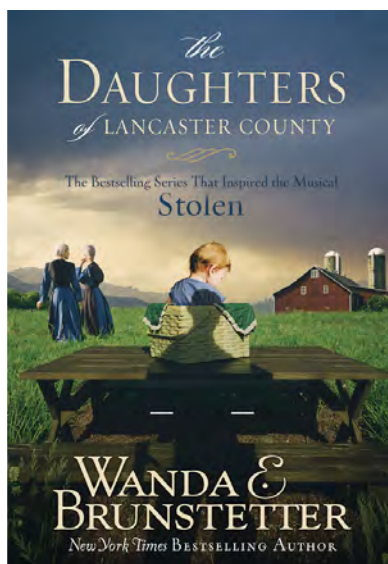
The Hope Jar

Prayer Jars #1

Wanda E. Brunstetter

Shiloh Run Press

What happens when making an elderly Amish couple very happy means going along with a lie that gets bigger by the day? Michelle is not who her new family believes her to be, but how can she tell the truth without hurting the ones she has come to truly love?



The Daughters of Lancaster County

Wanda E. Brunstetter

Barbour Books

Enjoy the three bestselling novels that inspired the made-for-stage musical *Stolen*. A three-part story unfolds in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where a child's kidnapping affects the whole Amish community. In the midst of the tragic aftermath, three young Amish women struggle to find hope and love. **FF**

Discover more about Wanda E. Brunstetter's books here:

<https://www.familyfiction.com/authors/wanda-brunstetter/books>

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2018 Christy Awards: Becky Wade Wins Book of the Year

Chris Fabry inducted into Christy Award Hall of Fame, awards handed out in nine fiction categories

The Christy Award is the foremost award honoring and promoting excellence in Christian fiction since 1999, and is named for Catherine Marshall's novel, *Christy*, which has sold over 10 million copies since its publication in 1967. ECPA assumed ownership and administration of the award in 2017 to focus and grow the unique opportunity of fiction in Christian publishing.

The winners of the 2018 Christy Awards were announced November 8 at the Christy Award Gala, held in Nashville's Shamblin Theatre at Lipscomb University. Nearly 200 authors, writers, publishers, and industry professionals were in attendance to honor the year's best in Christian fiction.

Becky Wade's novel *True to You* (Bethany House) won in two categories—Book of the Year and Contemporary Romance—at the 2018 Christy Award Gala. Also honored during the evening celebration, was five-time Christy Award-winning author **Chris Fabry**, who was inducted into the Christy Award Hall of Fame for his legacy and contributions to Christian fiction.

Photo of Becky Wade (left) by Kristen Fields - kristenfields.com

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(Photo l-r: ECPA's Stan Jantz with winning authors Laura Gallier, Michelle Griep, Laura Frantz, Jaime Jo Wright, Valerie Fraser Luesse, Mesu Andrews, Becky Wade, and Chris Fabry.)



Charles Martin, keynote speaker



Laura Gallier, winner of the 2018 Christy Award in the Young Adult category

All photos by: Kristen Fields, kristenfields.com

Becky Wade—Book of the Year and Contemporary Romance of the Year

*“Because I write heartwarming and humorous romances, I always hope that readers will close the final page of my books with a happy sigh and a smile. In this particular case, the theme of **True to You** is truth. I’m praying the Lord will use this story to remind readers of the fact that their true identity is, was, and always will be in Him.”*

<https://www.familyfiction.com/qa-becky-wade-true>

Presented by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association (ECPA), the event featured bestselling authors **Francine Rivers**, **Charles Martin**, **Carla Laureano**, and **Cynthia Ruchti**. There was also a tribute to the storytelling legacy of **Madeleine L’Engle**. The annual Christy Award ceremony celebrates excellence in the art of Christian Fiction and to honor the power of faith in story. “At a time when people are longing for stories of hope, the Christy Awards honor those authors whose excellent work proclaims the essence of hope because they tell the truth about life,” said ECPA president **Stan Jantz**. “Congratulations to those authors and their publishers whose novels were recognized for telling those stories especially well.”

The evening capped off two days of events that helped inspire, train, and encourage those established in the publishing industry as well as those aspiring to break into the market as writers, authors, or business leaders:

ECPA PubU was held as a training and connection event for the Christian publishing professional.

The Art of Writing Conference was created to build community and explore the leading questions and pressing issues facing creators and curators. **FF**

Here's the full list of awards handed out!

BOOK OF THE YEAR



True to You
Becky Wade
(Bethany House)

GENERAL FICTION



Life After
Katie Ganshert
(WaterBrook)

CONTEMPORARY ROMANCE



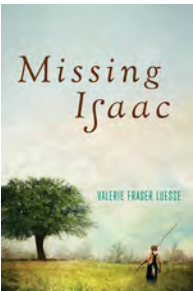
True to You
Becky Wade
(Bethany House)

HISTORICAL



Isaiah's Daughter
Mesu Andrews
(WaterBrook)

FIRST NOVEL



Missing Isaac
Valerie Fraser
Luesse
(Revell)

HISTORICAL ROMANCE



The Lacemaker
Laura Frantz
(Revell)

Chris Fabry—2018 Christy Award Hall of Fame Inductee

“What I see myself doing is the same thing the prophet Nathan did when he approached King David. David had sinned greatly—but the prophet told him a story that made him angry and want to judge the unkind protagonist. The story slipped around the back door of his heart and when he let it in, it convicted him because it showed him truth in a different way than simply didactic teaching.”

<https://www.familyfiction.com/chris-fabry-skys-limit>

MYSTERY/SUSPENSE/THRILLER



The House on Foster Hill
Jaime Jo Wright
(Bethany House)

VISIONARY



The Man He Never Was
James Rubart
(Thomas Nelson)



SHORT FORM
12 Days at Bleakly Manor
Michelle Griep
(Barbour Publishing)

YOUNG ADULT



The Delusion
Laura Gallier
(Wander)

2018 CHRISTY AWARD HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE

Chris Fabry



Deborah Raney

Sister to Sister

The Christian author talks about the real-life inspirations behind her latest series.

Deborah Raney's inspirational novels have garnered multiple awards including the RITA Award, HOLT Medallion, National Readers' Choice Award, and more. She recently launched the **Chandler Sisters** series with ***Reason to Breathe*** (Gilead Publishing).

In this interview, Deborah explains the theme for the new series, shares why her sisters might be nervous about these books, and reveals the character that surprised her the most.

Deborah, your new Chandler Sisters series revolves around three sisters who are reeling from personal tragedies and then start a new business together.

What inspired this setup?

There are usually multiple inspirations for each of my novels. This one definitely started with the idea of a sisters series. Being the oldest of four sisters and having my own sisters as best friends all my life, I've always thought it would be fun to capture the unique friendship that happens when people share your history from childhood.

(Of course, for my sisters' sakes, I've changed all the names and details to protect the innocent.)

But it has been a blast to explore sisters undertaking a business venture together—and that brings me to my next

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inspiration: *Fixer Upper*, *Home Town*, and other shows like those. I love the metaphors that home renovation shows inspire—ashes to beauty—and you'll see several of those in the Chandler Sisters novels.

What's the overarching theme or idea for the series?

Like so many of my books, this series has a strong undercurrent of redemption: God can redeem even the worst of situations. But another recurring theme in so many of my books is that family members—including those related by marriage and in this series, sisters especially—are precious friends and gifts from God. Even when we don't always see eye to eye, we make each other better.

The first book, *Reason to Breathe*, is about sister Phylicia Chandler. What can you tell us about her?

Phylicia (her family calls her Phee) is the oldest of the three sisters. After putting her life on hold to help care for their mom through a tragic cancer journey, Phee feels that life has passed her by—and that maybe it's too late for her to have a marriage like the one her own parents had. When she discovers some long-hidden secrets about her parents, she's not sure what she can believe in anymore.

Quinn Mitchell is the man who brings the sisters the business opportunity—and he's also falling for Phylicia. What can you tell us about him?

Quinn works for Phylicia's dad and actually met Phee when she was 16 and he was 28, so it takes him by surprise to realize that she's now all grown up. But he's been deeply wounded in a previous relationship and isn't sure he is ready to trust love again.



What about them made you want to tell their story?

I love that Quinn and Phee knew each other when their age difference made a relationship the last possibility on their minds, but now that it shouldn't matter, it does, for reasons neither of them imagined. In real life, conflict between a man and woman isn't nearly so much fun, but in fiction, it does keep the pages turning!

And I do love showing, through fiction, how a real-life couple can work out their differences in a way that honors God and feels like a win/win.

Which character in *Reason to Breathe* surprised you the most? (And why?)

I think the sisters' father, Turner Chandler, may be the one who surprised me most. Not only for the secrets he's been keeping since the day Phylcia was born, but also for the way he reacted to the death of his wife. I felt deeply for Turner—and sometimes wanted to wring his neck too! I've toyed with the idea of writing his story once the sisters' stories have been told.

What do you hope readers take away after reading *Reason to Breathe*?

I always write first to entertain. I hope readers fall in love with my characters and enjoy traveling along with them on their journey.

But after that, my hope is that readers will be reminded of the times when God held them in their most difficult moments and guided them to a life they never dreamed possible—because of His glorious grace. That’s been true in my own life, but sometimes it’s not until we look back on a trial that we see how incredibly close God was, and how He made all things work together for our good and His glory.

No spoilers, but what can we expect from subsequent books in the series?

As a seat-of-the-pants writer, I don’t know a lot of the spoilers yet myself! LOL! But I’m about halfway through writing the second book, *Chasing Dreams*, and it’s shaping up to be my favorite story of the bunch!

Chasing Dreams will be the story of middle sister Joanna, who meets the man of her dreams, only to discover that he comes with too many strings attached. Jo, with her analytical, lawyerly mind, has to decide whether she loves Lukas enough to commit to him, strings and all. And she just might discover that those strings are exactly what she’s needed in her life.

And of course, Book 3 will be youngest sister Britt’s story.

How does your faith impact how you approach storytelling?

I nearly always write about characters who are already well along on their journey of faith in Christ. I gave my life to Jesus as a teenager, and I've been deeply grateful and wildly intrigued to see the difference that faith makes in this crazy world we live in.

Whether we are believers or seekers or don't even know what's missing in our lives, we all have problems and trials and relationships that aren't what we wish they were. I love exploring how faith makes a difference in navigating those trials, and the ways our faith grows more in the midst of heartache than it ever does when things are going exactly our way.

What are the best ways that readers can support their favorite authors?

When I started writing, social media wasn't even a thing. I absolutely love that I can now connect with readers almost instantaneously through my Facebook readers group, or Instagram, or blog posts.

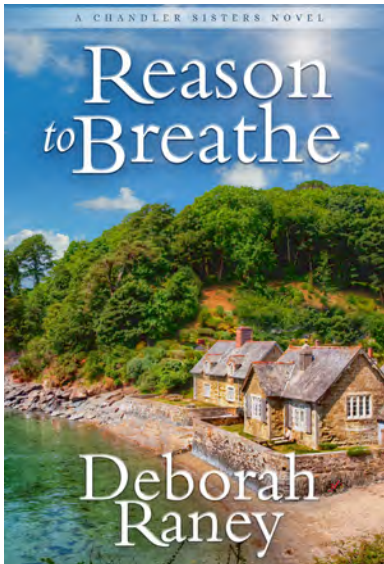
Most readers have no idea what an encouragement they are to writers when they sing our praises to their friends on social media or send a note letting us know how our book touched or taught or simply entertained them.

I want readers to know that telling others about my books is one of the best ways they can support me. That writing a review online is some of the best advertising around (and it's free!) And that I appreciate them more than they'll ever know. I always say that hearing from readers is like fuel for my writer's engine! **FF**

Deborah Raney

Visit Deborah Raney's author page here:

<https://www.familyfiction.com/authors/deborah-raney>



Reason to Breathe

Chandler Sisters #1

Deborah Raney

Gilead Publishing

Phylicia thought life was passing her by, but maybe this was love's plan all along...

At 29 Phylcia Chandler put her life on hold to care for her dying mother with her sisters, Joanna and Britt. Now Mom is gone and their father stuns them all by run-

ning off with a woman young enough to be their sister. Life is moving forward all around her, but Phylcia feels stuck—until her father's protégé, Quinn Mitchell, presents the sisters with an intriguing business opportunity to purchase a trio of cottages just outside of Langhorne, Missouri. Joanna and Britt are convinced the three of them should launch a vacation rental venture, but Phylcia remains skeptical.

To complicate matters, Quinn soon finds himself falling hard for Phylcia. But how can he pursue this beautiful, talented woman 12 years his junior when she's still reeling over her father's hasty engagement to a younger woman? Quinn is determined to give Phylcia her happily-ever-after. But first, he must help

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Deborah Raney

her come to terms with her discovery of long-held family secrets and persuade her that true love can transcend their differences. **FF**

Discover more about Deborah Raney's books here:

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Melanie Dobson is the award-winning author of almost 20 historical romance, suspense, and time-slip novels. Her novel ***Hidden Among the Stars*** (Tyndale House) is a time-slip novel about hidden treasure, a castle, and ordinary people who resisted evil in their own extraordinary way. In this Q&A, Melanie shares the unique perspective of her novel, how readers might relate to the themes in the book, and the Bible verse that sums up her story.



***Hidden Among the Stars* features several characters whose lives intersect after 80 years. How does this perspective make your novel unique?**

Not only can I invite readers on a historical journey through time-slip fiction, we can experience through story what happens as a result of the past. I love weaving together the threads of past and present storylines and ultimately having these stories collide near the end of a novel as secrets are revealed and old wounds are redeemed.

You explore fear, evil, and God's sovereignty in *Hidden Among the Stars*. How do you hope readers might relate these themes to their own lives?

When we experience tragedy, many of us ask where God is in the midst of this pain. Both the past and contemporary characters in *Hidden Among the Stars* struggle to understand where God was during the Holocaust and where God is today when people are hurting.



As I wrote this story, I was reminded that this life we're living is a battle, the world around us a battlefield, and as readers step into the fictional journey, I hope they are reminded that God doesn't run away when they are suffering. He is right in the midst of their pain, and in the end, no matter what evil does in its attempt to destroy this world, the peace and love and holiness of Christ will prevail.

In many of your novels, ordinary people are challenged to do extraordinary things. How did the historical characters in this novel respond differently to the same threat?

I am fascinated by how many seemingly ordinary people did incredible things during World War II to rescue those being threatened. In *Hidden Among the Stars*, I have characters who chose to risk their lives to help others escape while others chose to ignore the plight of their neighbors or even assist the Nazis with their destruction.

Some characters in this story were able to leave Austria while others decided to collaborate with the enemy. Some chose to hide, several felt so defeated that they quit trying to fight, and one took her own life because she feared what the Nazis might do. All were reacting to the same threat but responded in very different ways.

Your main characters find God’s beauty and power in nature, music, animals, and books. Where do you find God in your life?

I love to find glimpses of God wherever I go, but He seems to demonstrate His beauty and power to me most through the intricate design of His outdoor creation and the strength and wonder of weather, particularly a good snow or thunderstorm. My process of writing is, in part, listening and learning from the Master Creator. He speaks to me through story—both the ones I write and by hearing or reading other people’s stories as well. Through story, He often reveals an answer to something I’ve been struggling with in the most unexpected way.

If you could choose one Bible verse as a key theme for *Hidden Among the Stars*, which would it be?

“The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?” Psalm 27:1 (NIV). Throughout the writing of *Hidden Among the Stars*, God taught me once again that no matter what happens in this life, I don’t have to be afraid! **FF**

Visit Melanie Dobson’s author page here:

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Melanie Dobson



Hidden Among the Stars

Melanie Dobson

Tyndale House

To discover more about Melanie Dobson's books, CLICK here:

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Historical Julie Klassen

Award-winning historical romance author **Julie Klassen** offers readers the much-anticipated conclusion to her English village series with ***The Bride of Ivy Green*** (Bethany House) set in the Regency era. Much has happened in idyllic Ivy Hill in recent months, but while several villagers have found new love and purpose, questions remain—and a few dearly held dreams have yet to be fulfilled. In this Q&A, Julie tells about the research behind the new novel, how readers can enter the world of the series, and why—after so many stand-alone novels—Julie decided to write a series.



What can you tell us about your new book, *The Bride of Ivy Green*?

This is book three in Tales from Ivy Hill, the conclusion to the series. In the novel, the three main characters face new challenges and romantic possibilities. Also, a secretive new dressmaker arrives in the village, but the women soon suspect she isn't who she claims to be. Surprises lie in store—and wedding bells, too.

Did you have to do any new research to write this book?

Quite a lot, actually. I had to research dressmaking, British-Indian relations during the early 19th century, fairs and menageries, and Regency wedding traditions. Thankfully, I enjoy research.



How can readers learn more about all three books?

Readers can learn more by “visiting” the village of Ivy Hill through the special website we have devoted to the series ([TalesFromIvyHill.com](https://www.familyfiction.com)). The site includes a colorful village map, character list, photos, excerpts, author videos, and more.

Tales From Ivy Hill is your first series.

After so many stand-alone novels, why a series?

Two reasons. First, I often receive emails from readers asking for sequels or saying they don’t want a book to end. Sometimes I don’t either! After setting up an entire village and populating it with a cast of characters, it’s hard to say goodbye after one book.

Second, many readers (myself included) love village series set in England whether in books or on television. Series like *Lark Rise to Candleford*, *Cranford*, and *Thrush Green* draw us in with their close-knit communities filled with endearing characters. Or maybe it’s just the British accents! Whatever the reason, I hope readers will enjoy my first series as well.

Julie Klassen

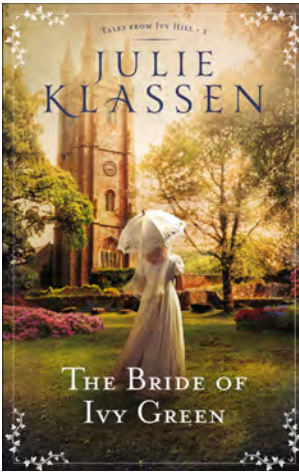
**Is it difficult to say goodbye to these characters?
Would you ever write more about them?**

Yes and yes! In fact, I have agreed to write a Christmas novella set in Ivy Hill, so readers and I don't have to say goodbye to them quite yet. (Tentative release: Fall 2020.) **FF**

Visit Julie Klassen's author page here:

<https://www.familyfiction.com/authors/julie-klassen>

Julie Klassen



The Bride of Ivy Green

Tales from Ivy Hill #3

Julie Klassen

Bethany House

To discover more about Julie Klassen's books, CLICK here:

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The author of more than 200 books(!), **Melody Carlson**'s titles have sold more than six million copies. For several years, she has published a brand-new annual Christmas story, and this year is no different! She continues her tradition with ***A Christmas by the Sea*** (Revell):



When Wendy Harper inherits her family's shabby but charming beachside cottage in Maine, can this Christmas season bring her the miracle she needs and provide her with the joy and love she never expected? In this Q&A, Melody shares why she writes a Christmas novella every year, reveals the inspiration behind the latest book, and explains how she manages to be so prolific.

You've written more than 200 books.

When did you first begin writing Christmas novels?

I can hardly believe that I wrote my first Christmas novella more than 16 years ago. Time flies when you're having fun. And I must admit that writing Christmas stories truly is fun for me. I look forward to writing many more!

What motivated you to write stories revolving around the Christmas season?

I'd written several children's Christmas books and felt like grown-ups needed some uplifting stories to get them into the Christmas spirit too—probably even more so than kids!

But because I realized that many people struggle during the holidays, I didn't want my stories to be all sugary sweetness. I wanted readers to relate to realistic characters and challenges



but to ultimately be inspired to embrace their own Christmas festivities with hope and enthusiasm.

My first Christmas novella, *Angels in the Snow*, came out in 2002. It was a story about an artist who'd lost her husband and son and was trying to get back to her art—and her life.

For some reason, it really seemed to connect with readers. At the time, few publishers were releasing holiday novellas, but because it worked, I've done them ever since.

What was your inspiration for writing *A Christmas by the Sea*?

We used to have a lovely little beach cabin and, for various reasons, decided to celebrate Christmas there one year. Just days before Christmas, we were walking the beach as usual and suddenly began finding sand dollars—dozens and dozens of them. We collected several hundred in just one morning!

After cleaning and drying them, I began to transform them into sand dollar “angels” that I used to decorate a Christmas tree we'd

Melody Carlson

placed in our sunroom. It was the most beautiful tree we'd ever had—and a sweetly memorable Christmas.

After that, I'd always planned to write a Christmas story set by the sea—and I finally did it!

What do you hope readers gain from *A Christmas by the Sea*?

As always, I hope they'll be entertained and uplifted. My main character, Wendy, has a lot of challenges facing her. She's a widowed mom with massive bills who is simply trying to provide stability for her preteen son, and naturally, it's not easy.

I was raised by a single mom, so I understand this personally. I hope readers will relate to her challenges and be inspired by her ingenuity, as well as be encouraged to welcome their own holiday challenges with creativity and hope.

You have been such a prolific author, writing in different genres and for different age groups. What keeps the ideas coming for you? Where do you find inspiration, and what do you do if you are not feeling inspired?

It takes very little to get a story percolating in me. It can be a scene that makes me wonder, a sentence from the newspaper, a vivid dream, a childhood memory—and so on. I find inspiration all around me and the challenge is to not try to make everything into a book.

But sometimes, if I've been crunching on a deadline, or life is a challenge, I will take a break and clear my head—usually spending some time in nature—and wait until I feel inspired. Thankfully, it never takes very long. **FF**

Melody Carlson

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A Christmas by the Sea

Melody Carlson

Revell

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As an author, **Lisa M. Clark** takes joy in exploring a variety of categories, including Christian fiction, children's books, and devotional books. She wraps up her dystopian series **The Messengers** with ***Revealed*** (Concordia Publishing): Time is running out, and the end is drawing near. Who will survive the battle to preserve the Message? In this interview, Lisa explains the world of *The Messengers*, her inspirations for the series, and how fiction allows her to wrestle with tough questions.



Lisa, explain for our readers the world of *The Messengers* novels...

Simon Clay, the protagonist of *The Messengers*, lives in Westbend, New Morgan, a country set in the near future. It's a dystopian world where much is in decay and disrepair. Every moment of every day, Simon and the people of New Morgan are watched. There's a timeless quality of the world that seems both new and very familiar.

No spoilers, but how does *Revealed* fit into the bigger picture?

"Bigger picture" is a great phrase because Simon definitely gets a sense of the bigger picture in the last book of this series. Slowly throughout each novel, Simon becomes more aware of the world around him, and his perspective widens a great deal in *Revealed*.



This becomes the case for the readers too. Simon begins to learn more about his role as a believer in the world and throughout time, and readers will hopefully evaluate their own roles with their brothers and sisters in Christ as well as with others who do not know the Message worth dying for. I hope readers question what it means to live in a world where they are not understood.

What were your inspirations or touchpoints for creating this series?

I'm a former high school teacher, and I was just finishing up graduate school when this plot came to me. My heart ached for teenagers who are trying to figure out what it means to be a Christian in a countercultural way.

I wanted to encourage them. I wanted to challenge them. And I wanted them to know that the fight is worth it.

I also wanted to help clarify what the “fight” is all about anyway. “Who is my enemy?” That’s an important question that Simon explores.

The bonus was that this fiction series helped me navigate tough questions myself, and I love to hear how many adults are reading them. Some are reading them for themselves. Others are reading with their kids, grandkids, youth groups, and students.

It's a joy for me to know how many times Simon has sparked conversation across generations.

What are the benefits or challenges of world building as a Christian author?

World building in general is an interesting challenge! At first, it was great to let my imagination run wild. But by the second book, I had to be consistent! There's an entire document now that my editors and I created simply to keep details straight.

As a Christian author, I wrestled with many questions about the world I was creating. It's important to me as a Christian to be honest about reality. And that includes the fact that our world is not perfect. In order to talk about grace and forgiveness, we need to acknowledge the need for both.

The dystopian genre was a perfect way for me to explore some of the dark places in our lives while also shining the Light of the world. I tried to balance the dark places with hope, and I tried to write so that different readers with different maturity levels will take in certain themes in appropriate ways. That was especially the case in the last book.

Ultimately, I didn't write anything that hasn't already happened in one way or another, which was a way for me to stay honest in my setting.

What do you hope readers take away after reading *Revealed*?

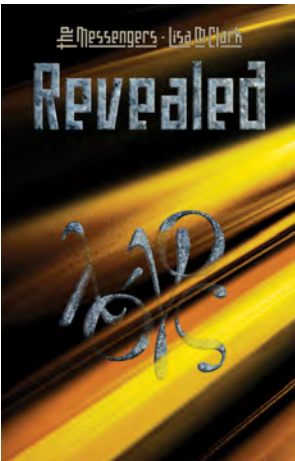
I hope readers know that they are not alone. There are other believers who love them, and they have a Savior who considers each person precious.

I hope readers understand that the Word is as important as life or death and that we cannot take it for granted.

I hope readers look at their world and especially at the people around them in a new light. As Simon's father said once, "People aren't the enemy. They're the prize." **FF**

Visit Lisa M. Clark's author page here:

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Revealed

The Messengers #3

Lisa M. Clark

Concordia Publishing

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Jeffrey Wilson has at one time worked as an actor, a firefighter, a paramedic, a jet pilot, a diving instructor, a Naval Officer, and a vascular and trauma surgeon. He also served numerous tours in Iraq and Afghanistan as a Navy combat surgeon, deploying with an East Coast-based SEAL Team as part of a Joint Special Operations Task Force. The co-author of several No. 1-selling thrillers, he goes solo for his military thriller **War Torn**. Based on personal experiences, *War Torn* details a young man's crisis of faith after a tour of combat duty in Afghanistan turns tragic. In this interview, Jeffrey shares the facts behind the fiction, the challenges for a Christian author writing about violent events, and the ministerial heart behind the project.



Jeffrey, *War Torn* is based on your personal experiences. How much of this book is “what happened” vs. you wrote a story “inspired” by certain real events?

For sure, I'd have to say that this is inspired much more than what happened in terms of the story events. My own deployments and the events leading to my own crisis of faith are pretty different from those that Jake experiences in *War Torn*.

I intentionally wrote Jake as the “Everyman” kind of soldier, because it was important to me that he be relatable to be very diverse cross section of wartime experience. Anyone who has suffered loss or seen death or taken a life in a war zone can related to the things Jake experiences.



Had I written this from the perspective of an elite Navy SEAL, as I do in my other works such as the Tier One series, it may have been more exciting and entertaining, but it would have resonated with a much smaller population of war fighters.

The feelings of loss, the guilt, the questions about where God is in the horrors of war, why a loving God could allow such things—these are more universal, and for certain I drew more heavily on my personal experiences in this part of the book than in the earlier chapters.

My wife Wendy was a huge part of my finding my way back to God, and her own experience dealing with all that we went through heavily informs the struggles of Rachel in the book. And I could never have come close to writing the story of the pastors in the book without close counsel from my good friends Pastor Chris Bonham and Pastor Craig Altman.

So, there are a lot of true stories and emotions wrapped up in the story of Jake and Rachel, as well as Craig and Chris, but the details of the story are just that, a story designed to resonate broadly with those who have their own stories and struggles.

Your previous novels have been bestsellers with general market publishers. However, *War Torn* has been harder to place with a publisher. Would you share some of the challenges you've had getting this book out to the public?

Well, I've learned there are a lot of idiosyncrasies to the faith market for sure. When the book was done and my agent began to shop it, we started with faith publishers, of course.

We met a lot of resistance—not to the message, but to some of the content. We were told more than once by faith-based publishers that the graphic nature of the combat sequences may be too much for their readers. All of them loved the book, and several were insightful enough to admit that softening the trauma of the wartime sections of the book would diminish the message, and they recommended that we keep looking for a home.

On the other hand, the mainstream publishers loved the story, but asked if I could soften the religious message and focus on the PTSD. Which, of course, would defeat the purpose of the book—which is to share the message that the real hope for the crisis that occurs in war is in Jesus Christ and a closer relationship with God.

It was, to say the least, frustrating. I get that the mainstream houses are not really set up to sell in that market. And while I understand the desire by the faith-based publishers to produce product they don't feel will be poorly received, I'm still, like,

“Hey—I’m a Christian and I lead a men’s military ministry, and I still watched the last Bourne movie and read Brad Taylor.” I guess my point is it felt a little maternalistic.

It was frustrating beyond belief. But each time I prayed about it, I had the overwhelming sense that God had it under control and that it would all work out in his time.

And it certainly has. Despite my frustration, this book is out now at the perfect time, where I am better equipped to support the message, the need has never been greater, and I have a platform I can use together with the book to get the message of hope out there in a way I couldn’t have before my other writing success.

How does your faith impact how you approach writing?

Well, obviously in *War Torn* it is the absolute focus of the story. But even in my other books, I strongly resist to put things in the books that are gratuitous.

Don’t get me wrong, my characters can be salty when that’s the reality of the story, but I don’t do any of that for effect—only when the story or character demands it. Most of my stories are meant only to entertain, but for sure I don’t want to compromise my faith for that entertainment, and I’m pretty sure I don’t.

War Torn is different. While I hope it is both touching and entertaining, there is a message of hope through Christ that I want very much to share with families who need it.

What are the challenges of being a Christian writing stories about characters struggling with trauma and violence? Does your worldview ever cause a conflict with your co-authors?

Writing on those topics can be a challenge no matter what—especially when you’re creating experiences that you’ve dealt with yourself. There are times in many of my books where writing a particular scene or interaction takes me back to places hard to go or stirs up memories of those I’ve lost.

But that’s a good thing. While sometimes painful, that’s what brings the realism that the Andrews & Wilson brand is now famous for.

In *War Torn*, which is by intent deeply personal and therefore painful, that was magnified a thousand times because the emotions and struggles were the heart of the story. And many of those emotions were mine.

It made it harder than ever to write—and harder still to read and edit. It was emotionally exhausting. But if the book can help a single combat veteran or spouse find their way to a closer walk through the fictional experiences of Jake and Rachel, well, that is so worth it.

My only co-author is one of my closest friends—Brian Andrews, a fellow Navy veteran—and we share a worldview. Because we are like brothers, even the minor differences we may have cause no conflict at all personally. We have the utmost respect for one another personally and professionally.

What do you hope readers get out of *War Torn*?

I hope that the story will resonate with military members and veterans who have experienced the painful questions about God that are found in the horrors of war—and that maybe Jake’s journey to find answers will help them on their own journey. Same for their families, and especially their spouses.

Wendy and her amazing faith were central to my finding my way all the way home. I hope spouses find inspiration in Rachel’s story.

And the message in the book is not unique to combat veterans—there are any of a myriad of tragedies we suffer in our fallen world that raise the same questions and doubts. I hope that the book can help others through their own struggles outside of war, of course.

Lastly, I hope that *War Torn* can provide insight for those without a direct connection to the military, in the hope they can better understand the sacrifices made by both military members and their families. In particular, we have a vision of duplicating around the country the men’s military ministry and the military spouse support group that we have been able to launch at our church in Tampa.

These ministries have had a tremendous impact on families in need, and we pray that there can be faith-based support like ours in all communities across the country, especially now, in the face of the longest continuous war in our history. That’s why we want pastors, group leaders, and other faith organizations to read this book and not only learn about these needs, but be inspired to address them in their own communities.

Jeffrey Wilson

To that end, we are offering support through links to organizations that can help the veterans and their families, and speakers and other support to churches and organizations wishing to start their own ministries. We can be reached for this help at our website, WarTornNovel.com, and there is a page to contact us directly there as well. **FF**

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War Torn

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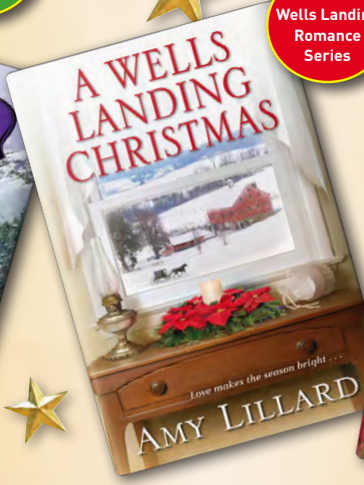
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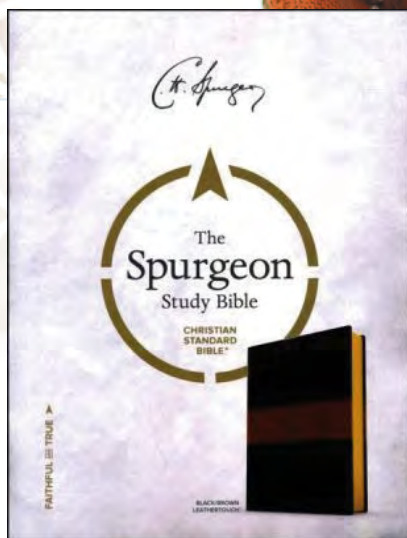
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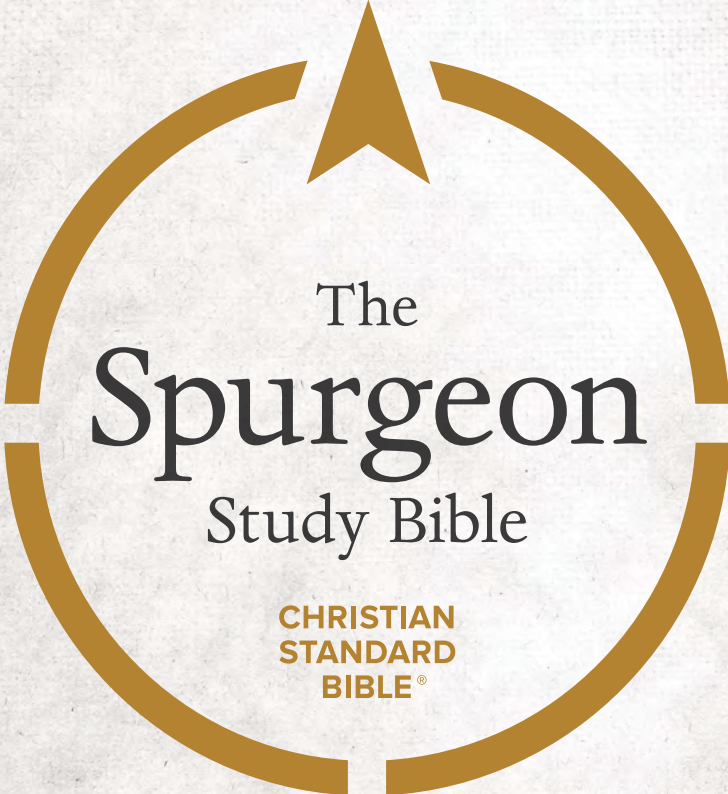
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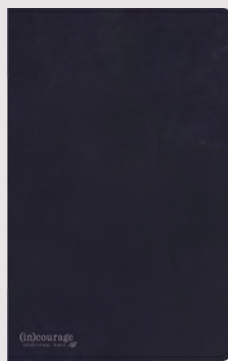


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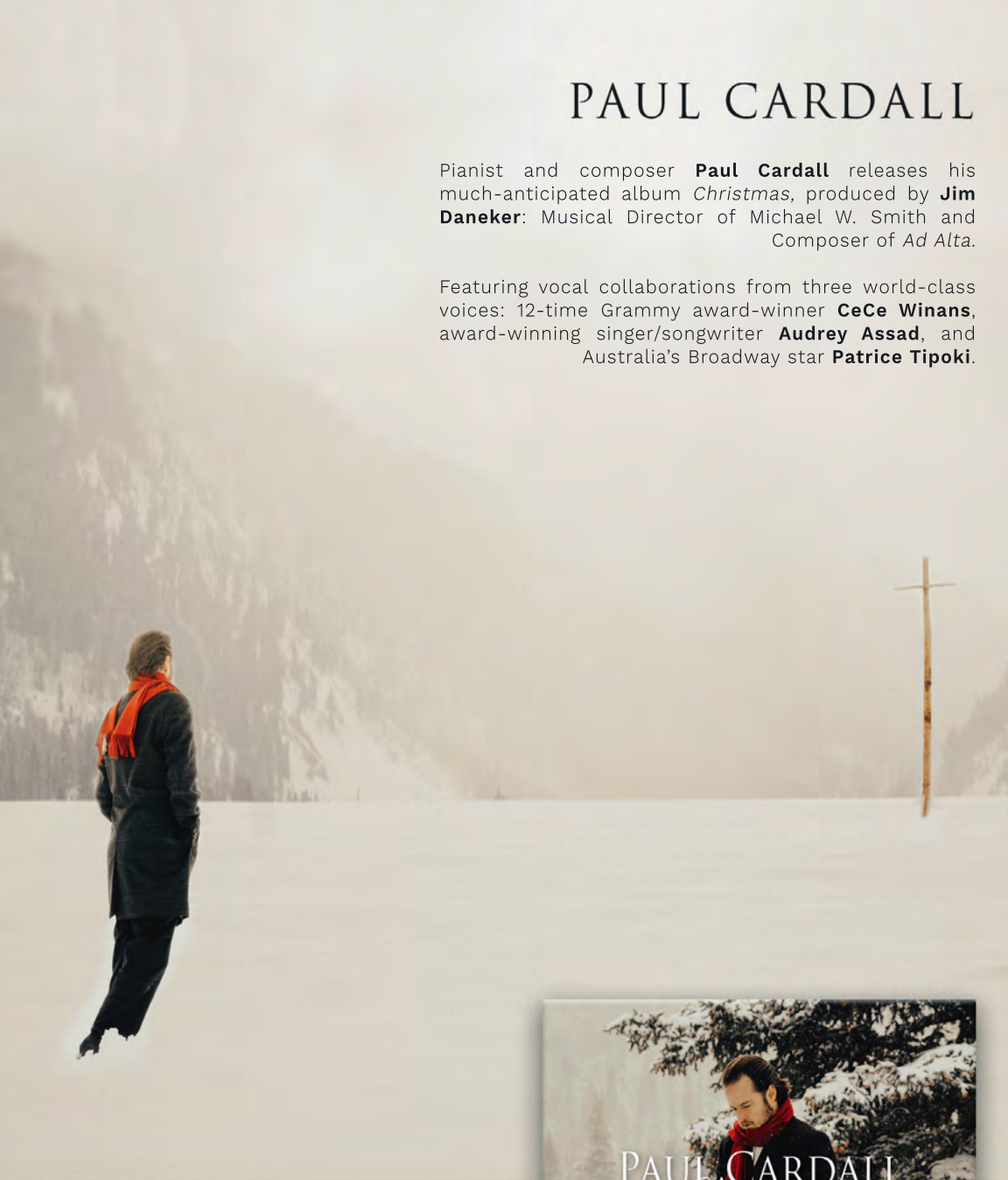
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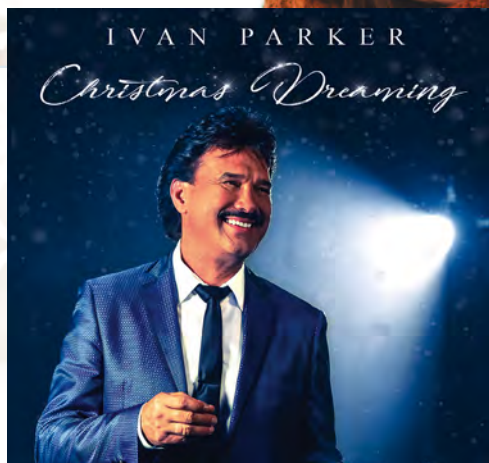


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“It’s my hope that this collection presents the spirit of Christmas morning—the peace that brings us closer together at the holidays,” said Parker. “‘It’s the Most Wonderful Time of the Year’ and ‘There’s No Place Like Home for the Holidays’ take me right back to my childhood and Christmas with my family. And the newer classic, ‘My Grown Up Christmas List,’ is so fitting for the times we live in now. With much confusion and division in the world, it was important for me to have a song about love, peace and the restoration of joy. Forget the problems and the things that divide us and let’s go back to what the season is all about.”

“Most of all, I want people to understand the real reason for Christmas,” Parker emphasizes. “Carols like ‘What Child Is This’ and ‘It Came Upon A Midnight Clear’ point us back to the manger—these are the songs that present Jesus, the true Hope of Christmas.”

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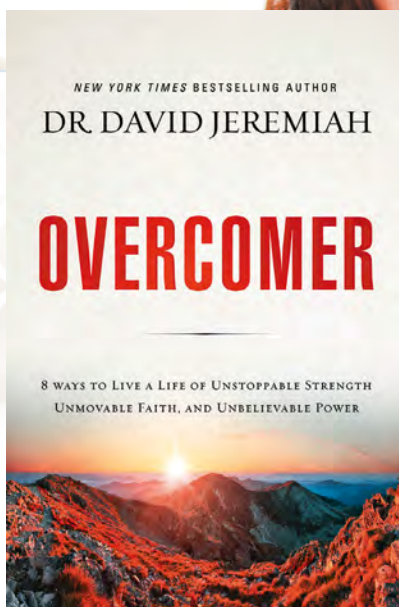
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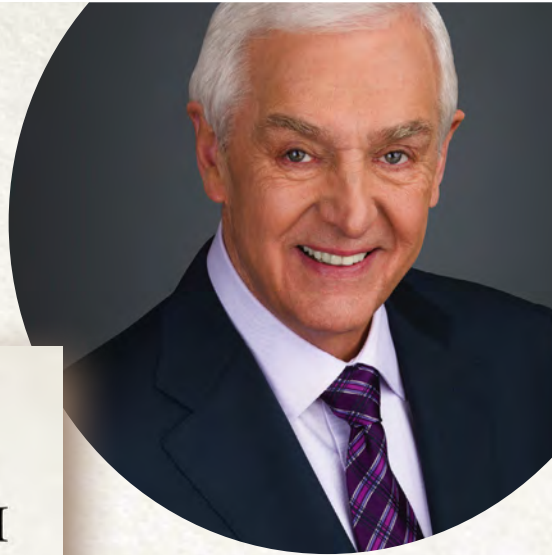
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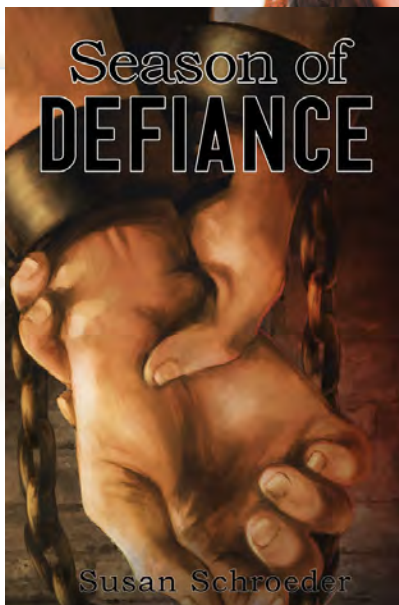
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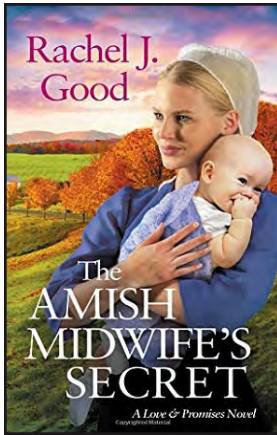


Season of **DEFIANCE**



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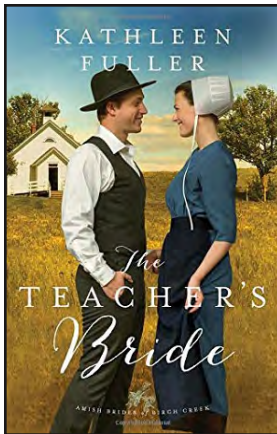
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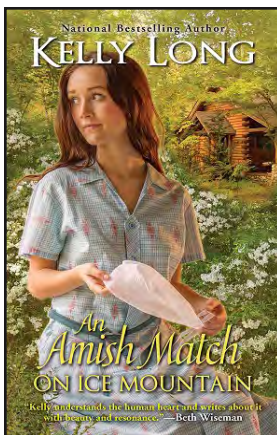
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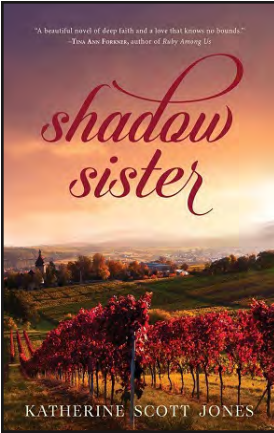
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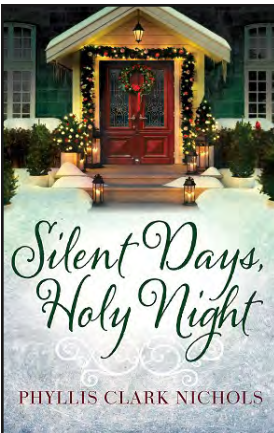
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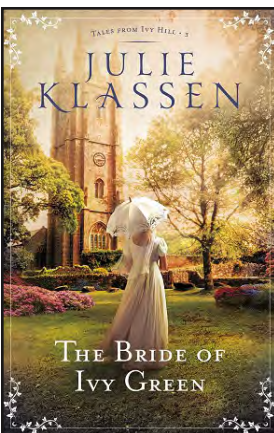
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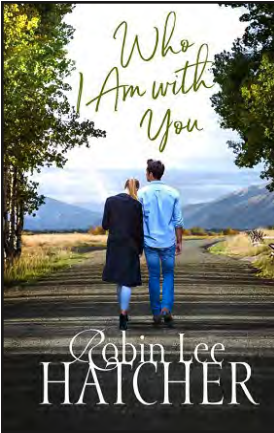
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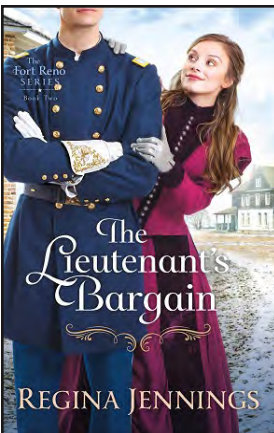
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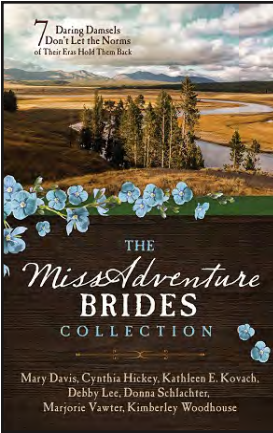
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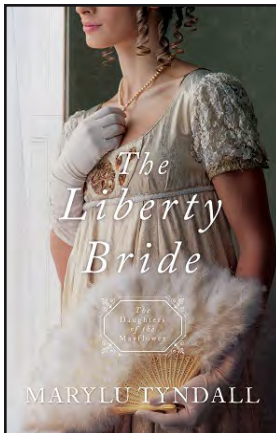
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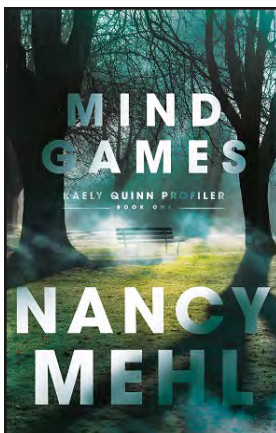
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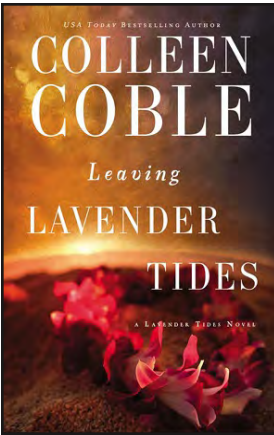
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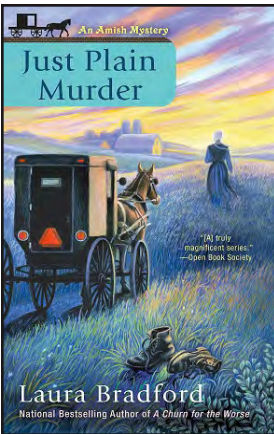
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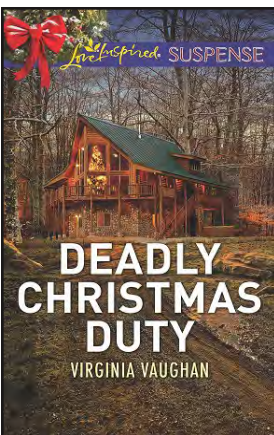
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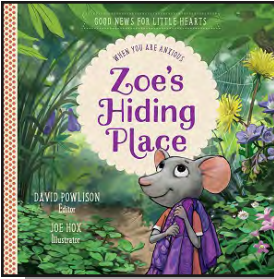
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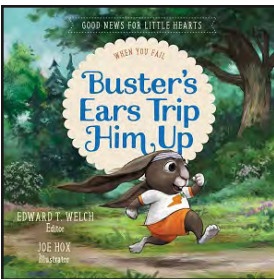
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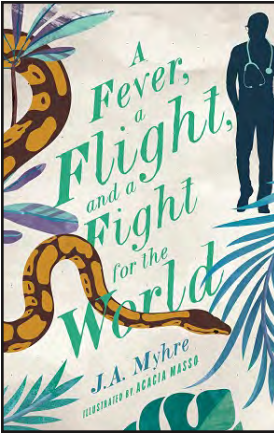


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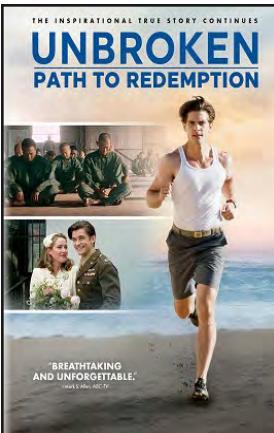
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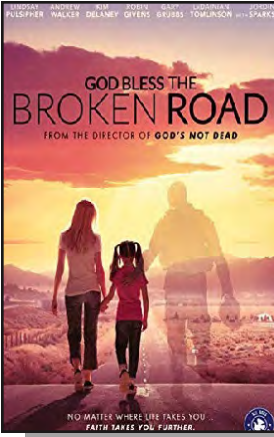
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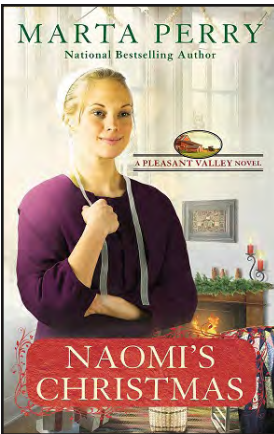
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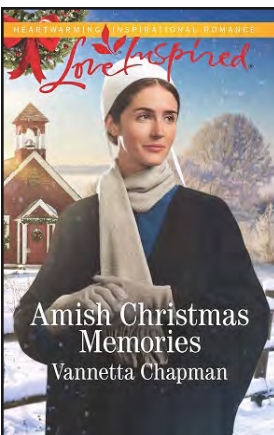
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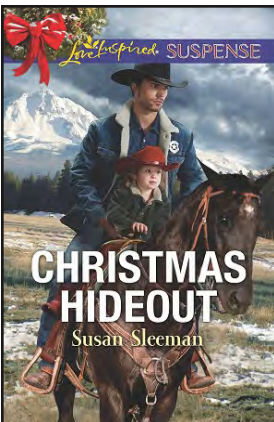
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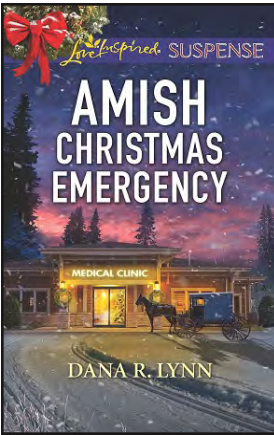
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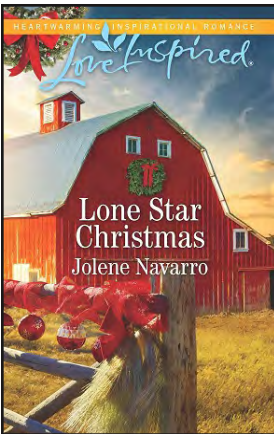
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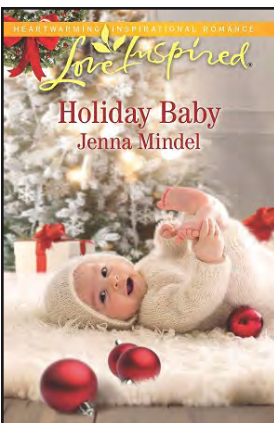
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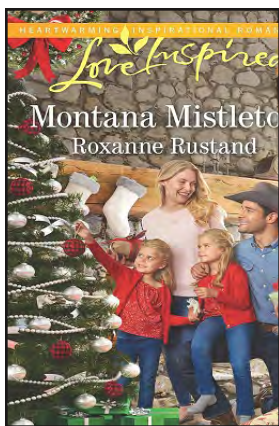
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