

FamilyFiction

January 2019

A close-up portrait of a woman with long, dark, wavy hair and bangs. She is smiling warmly at the camera, showing her teeth. She is wearing a red top and a large, ornate, teardrop-shaped earring with intricate scrollwork. The background is dark and out of focus.

Romantic Suspense Author
LYNETTE EASON

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Cynthia Ruchti | Tamera Alexander | Amy Lillard

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Kathie Lee Gifford on her new children's book

The Gift That I Can Give

In her new children's book, longtime television host Kathie Lee Gifford inspires children to find their passion and purpose.

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Irene Hannon Invites Readers *Back to Hope Harbor* Due in April 2019

When Jeannette and Logan find themselves pulled into the life of a tattered Christian family fleeing persecution, they discover that love can come calling when it's least expected...

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Lynette Eason

Out of the Dark

The author shares her favorite recipe for inspirational romantic suspense.

Lynette Eason is the bestselling author of the *Women of Justice* and the *Elite Guardians* series. She's won three ACFW Carol Awards, the Selah Award, and the Inspirational Reader's Choice Award, among others. Her *Blue Justice* series continues with ***Code of Valor*** (Revell), which sends readers on a race for the truth in this heart-stopping story of risk, regret, and redemption. In this interview, Lynette shares what drew her to these leading characters, explains what inspired the financial crimes angle, and reveals what it's like working with other romantic suspense authors.

Lynette, *Code of Valor* revolves around Detective Brady St. John and financial crimes investigator Emily Chastain. What about these two characters drew you to write their story?

Brady St. John is one of the brothers of the St. John family and I've really been looking forward to writing his story. He's on the dive team for the police department that he works for so I knew his story would revolve around water.

As for Emily, I wanted her to have overcome a rather difficult past. The truth was, I wasn't sure she was the right person for Brady—until I had him save her life. She needed that. She needed a rescuer. More than that, she needed someone she could trust in order for her to truly allow herself to love. Turns out, Brady was the perfect guy for her.

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What inspired the plot in *Code of Valor*?

I don't know that there was one thing that inspired the plot. I was interested in an occupation that took place in a bank and I needed someone who could spot financial crimes. That's how Emily's occupation came about.

Because I knew the story would take place on/under water, I worked the plot to make that happen. In truth, I tend to just make my plots happen, I'm not really "inspired" by one thing or another other than an interest in making something work around a particular occupation that I want to research. LOL. Not always, but in this case, yes.

What kind of research do you have to do when your characters have "official" law enforcement jobs?

Fortunately, I have so many friends and online groups that I can turn to when I need to make sure I've gotten it right. Since law enforcement isn't my background, I was a little terrified of trying to write it.

But it was my interest. It was something that fascinated me, so, with a pray on my lips, I started a story about 10 years ago and God just sent the right people at the right time to give me feedback and teach me.

He also sent the Writers' Police Academy. I can't even begin to tell you all of the fabulous research opportunities and contacts available at this conference. It's hands-down the best law enforcement conference on the planet for writers.

Killer Nashville is a very close second. I also have two FBI agents who read each story and give me feedback. I've learned a lot in the 10-plus years I've been doing this and I'm told that I'm getting better with the law enforcement stuff with each book I write. LOL.

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

Characters who readers can relate to are essential. If a reader doesn't develop a connection to the characters then that reader has no real incentive to keep reading even if the plot is interesting.

I think our characters have to be likeable and sympathetic, but also flawed. Who wants to read about perfect people?

I also think characters who learn and change for the better as the story progresses is super important. Readers need their characters to have some kind of character arc or an epiphany by the end of the story.

For your novels, you juggle elements of faith, romance, and suspense. What do you consider the best recipe for an inspirational romantic suspense story?

I think a definite balance is necessary to create a story that readers want to finish—and hopefully, revisit at some point in the future. From some of the feedback I get, it seems a lot of my readers really enjoy the suspense aspect of the stories more than anything else. They like the romance thread and are happy to have the faith element in there.

I also get a lot of comments about appreciating the clean reads. But, above all, they REALLY like that high-octane suspense. So, that's what I tend to lean toward when I'm working on the stories—making it as suspenseful as possible.

You recently teamed up with Dee Henderson and Dani Pettrey for the romantic suspense collection *The Cost of Betrayal* (Bethany House). How did that project come about?

Dani Pettrey was the lead on that one, I think. I'm pretty sure it was her idea and she ran it by her editor who loved the idea and put it all together.

One day, I got an email asking if I was interested in doing the collection and, of course, I jumped on it! Dee was mentor to both Dani and myself, so I think having our names on a cover with hers was a bucket list item for the two of us. I know it was for me anyway. We've done two of those collections and I'd love to do more.

What was the inspiration for your novella, *Code of Ethics*?

It's funny. I don't really have "inspiration" for my stories. However, Ruthie St. John is the heroine in that novella because I knew I wanted to write her story. So, I sat down and gave her one. Sometimes it's really just that simple.

You also wrote one of the books in the Military K-9 Unit series. Did you and the other authors coordinate at all or are these standalone books?

In the Military K-9 Unit series, the editors come up with the "bible." They work out the characters and the story lines and then assign each author one of the stories.

This time, there were eight of us in the series—the previous ones had been six—so it was a little more exciting trying to coordinate everything. And no, the books are not really standalone books. The mystery starts in book one and isn't solved until book eight.

When you're writing for these multi-author projects, what are the pros and cons vs. just writing on your own?

Pros: There's always someone to brainstorm with. LOL. There's always someone to whine to and get encouragement from. You get to know each other very well and as a result of these collaboration efforts, I've made lifelong friends and prayer buddies.

Cons: Coordinating everything. It takes a lot to juggle the information that needs to go in the story and writing other authors characters can be challenging. You think you're never going to be able to pull it off.

Lynette Eason

What are the challenges of being a Christian author writing about crimes and people in jeopardy?

Maybe just that the research can be so dark sometimes. I wrote about serial killers for a while and I had to get out of that mindset after the end of the third book because it's just a lot of darkness. You don't want to stay there too long.

The good thing about writing Christian fiction is that you get to show the light, too. And you don't have to be subtle about it. LOL. **FF**

Visit Lynette Eason's author page here:

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Code of Valor

Blue Justice
Lynette Eason
Revell



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Amy Clipston

Forgiveness and Faith

The Amish author shares how her fiction ministers to her as much as it does her readers.

Amy Clipston is the bestselling author of the *Kauffman Amish Bakery* and *Hearts of Lancaster Grand Hotel* series. Her Amish Homestead series continues with ***A Seat by the Hearth*** (Zondervan): Priscilla Allgyer knows she cannot leave the past behind—but can love lead her toward the promise of healing? In this interview, Amy explains the overarching theme of the books, reveals why her leading man reminds her of her father, and suggests why Amish fiction is so popular.

Amy, *A Seat by the Hearth* is the third book in the Amish Homestead series. What can you tell us about the overarching arc or theme of the series?

I think all of my books have the theme of forgiveness and faith in God. All of my characters go through a journey of realizing that God's love for them is eternal, no matter what they face, whether it's navigating grief or a broken relationship. My characters learn that God is bigger than their problems and will always carry them through their troubled waters.

How does *A Seat by the Hearth* fit into the bigger picture of the series?

A Seat by the Hearth is Mark Riehl's story. He is the second oldest son in the Riehl family and Laura's twin. This story features his road to finding his forever love.

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Tell us about Priscilla Allgyer and Mark Riehl. What about them made you want to tell their story?

Oh, I had so much fun writing this book! Mark Riehl is my favorite character in the series. He is a jokester and also a flirt. He's used to having girls following him around while waiting for him to ask one of them to date him.

When he meets Priscilla, the tables have turned for him, and for the first time, he finds himself falling for her, but he has to work to get her attention.

I enjoyed having Mark doubt himself and have to ask his older brother for advice for a change. I also enjoyed exploring Priscilla's character since she has been hurt by her father and then her ex-boyfriend. It was fun to have Priscilla return to her community and find her way back home.

You've said the character of Mark Riehl tells many of the jokes your father told when you were growing up. What inspired you to incorporate this trait into the novel?

I wanted to include some memories of my father. I enjoy weaving some of my life and my favorite memories into my books. It's sort of my way of connecting to my father and sharing a little piece of myself in my books.

What's your favorite thing about writing Amish romances?

I enjoy finding new ways to tell an Amish story. I like talking on the phone with my Amish friend and running ideas by her. I enjoy writing about the Amish culture because I'm fascinated by it. I learn something new with every book I write. I have a deep respect for their faith and the way they live plainly.



In what ways does your faith impact how you approach telling stories?

My books minister to me as much as they might touch my readers. When I'm on deadline, I pray for the right words and I even add myself to the prayer list at church. I also read Scripture and look for verses that are appropriate for ministering to my characters. I lean a lot on prayer and I continually ask God to guide my words and my characters when I work on a book.

You were one of the authors interviewed for the "Amish Romance" episode of "Follow This!"

How did you feel about how the episode turned out?

Oh my goodness! I was so pleased with the episode! As Shelley Shepard Gray told me the morning it went live, it felt like Christmas morning when I watched it!

I loved the angle reporter Bim Adewunmi took for the story. She came at the topic as a romance reader who was interested in finding out more about the Amish romance genre.

I enjoyed her interviews with the readers and the Amish family. It was amazing! I'm so grateful BuzzFeed contacted me and offered to come to our Girl Getaway in Ohio.

Have you heard any feedback from readers about the episode? (Any new readers who discovered you through it?)

I've only heard feedback from my coworkers at the City of Charlotte. I don't normally talk about my books at work, so it's been fun for my coworkers to see that side of my life. I hope I've gained new readers after the episode aired, but I honestly don't know of any.

Why do YOU think Amish romances are so popular with readers?

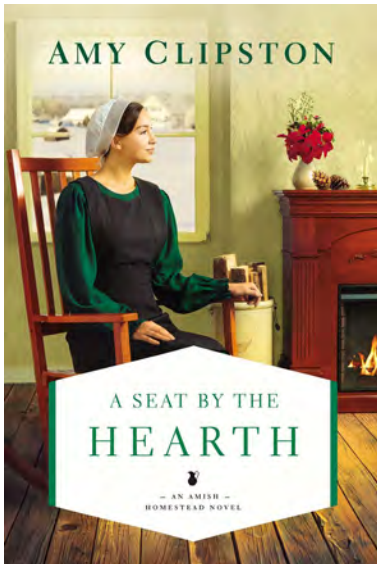
I believe that in our busy time filled with ringing cellular phones, waiting email messages, and crazy commutes, people crave the simplicity of Amish life. We're all enthralled with the horse and buggy, along with the farms, quilts, and the food. We all long for a simpler time, even though life on a farm is really, really hard work.

What are your favorite ways to hear from or connect with your readers?

I love connecting with readers over social media! They can find me on Facebook and Instagram. **FF**

Visit Amy Clipston's author page here:

<https://www.familyfiction.com/authors/amy-clipston>



A Seat by the Hearth

Amish Homestead #3

Amy Clipston

Zondervan



Priscilla Allgyer knows she cannot leave the past behind. But can love lead her toward the promise of healing?

Priscilla left the community to escape the expectations of Amish

life. Now, years later, she is forced to return—along with her 6-year-old son—to the place she thought she'd left behind forever. Though once estranged from her family, Priscilla is welcomed by her mother, but her father is cold and strict. He allows Priscilla to stay with them provided she dresses plainly, confesses her sins, and agrees to marry within the community. Once again, she feels suffocated, trapped, and alone.

As Priscilla reluctantly completes her shunning, she catches the eye of Mark Riehl, a farmer with a playboy reputation. Wary of Mark, Priscilla barely gives him the time of day—while Mark, unused to being ignored by the women of Bird-in-Hand, won't give up the pursuit of her friendship. Priscilla desperately needs a friend in Mark, even if she doesn't realize it—and after Priscilla's father and the bishop catch her and Mark in a compromising situation, their relationship becomes more complicated than ever.

Amy Clipston

As affection quietly grows between them, Priscilla struggles to open her heart and reveal the painful secrets of her past. As Mark works to earn her good faith, can they both learn the hard lessons of love and trust? And can two friends discover a happiness that only God himself could have designed? The third book in the Amish Homestead series, *A Seat by the Hearth* invites us back to the Lancaster community where friendships are forged and love overcomes all.

Discover more about Amy Clipston's author page here:

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Joshua A. Johnston

Epic Journeys

The author talks about inhabiting a science fiction world with faith.

Joshua A. Johnston was raised on sci-fi TV and film before being introduced to the wider universe of science fiction literature as a teen. His latest novel, *Through Chaos* (Enclave), is the third book in his **Chronicles of Sarco** series. Captain Jared Carter and the Navy cruiser Hattan have helped liberate an alien race from the clutches of darkness, but at a terrible cost of lives and ships. When they receive word that a shocking fate has befallen the Confederacy during the Hattan's distant campaign, the crew faces the prospect that their home as they knew it is no more. In this interview, Joshua talks about series, explains the qualities of Captain Jared Carter, and reveals the origins of his surprising side project.

Joshua, *Through Chaos* is the third book in the Chronicles of Sarco. What can you tell us about the overarching story of the series?

The Sarco series is an epic space adventure, set across a wide swath of the galaxy in a far future, some time after Earth has lost most of its history through a Dark Age. The trilogy centers around a great evil that emerges from far away, threatening both humanity and its allies, and how Jared Carter and those under his command will confront that evil.

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Tell us about the creating the world of this series.

What details or ideas (or stories) inspired this world?

From the outset, I wanted to try and write the same kind of story that had given me such a sense of wonder as a kid. By that, I mean the feeling I got when the U.S.S. Enterprise reached some distant, uncharted world, or when the Millennium Falcon crisscrossed the galaxy, or when Doctor Who took the TARDIS to some exotic new place in space and time.

From the start, I wanted readers to feel like they were on an epic journey, one where they, too, could visit strange new worlds and face new dangers.

When you're building a whole world from scratch, how detailed do you have to be? How much stuff doesn't even make it into the stories?

Since I was dealing with both human and alien civilizations, each of those societies had its own sociology and culture. That made for all kinds of world-building.

Some of it did wind up on the cutting room floor, although, between the three novels and four short stories, I was able to squeeze in a lot more than I thought I'd be able to. It was fun to find little, organic ways to sprinkle things in, even in the waning moments of *Through Chaos*.

What are the challenges for a Christian author to invent a fantastical world that's still grounded in a biblical reality?

I think the biggest challenge is deciding what kind of Christian novel one wants to write. One school of thought is that the stories should deal directly with Jesus and the Bible, perhaps with conversion stories and even apologetics.



The other school of thought is that the stories should incorporate Christian themes in a more salient way, be it allegorical or drawing from biblical themes. I don't know that there is a wrong way, *per se*, but figuring out which direction to go is a really important decision.

From early on, I determined that I wanted my approach to be more salient, in the vein of *Narnia* or *Lord of the Rings*. For me, the next step was figuring out how to situate faith in a science fiction world in a way that was natural for both.

It was a big challenge, but also came with a big sense of accomplishment, especially in the way things played out in the endgame.

What are the qualities of Jared Carter that made you want to tell his story?

What I like most about Jared Carter is this: While he isn't necessarily the strongest or smartest guy, even among his

own crew, he has a large capacity for growth. He learns, and he works hard, and he doesn't quit.

He's a leader, not because he's exceptionally charismatic, but because he makes the effort to connect with people, and while he does make mistakes, he learns from them. In short, he's an everyman who is greater than sum of his parts.

Alongside the Chronicles of Sarco, you've also written a companion series of short stories. How do the Tales of Sarco fit into the bigger picture?

To understand that, I should take a moment to trace how those stories came to be. In the months prior to the release of the first Sarco novel, *Edge of Oblivion*, the marketing guru for Enclave at the time suggested I put together a free short story to help create a little buzz for the book.

It sounded sort of interesting, so I scripted out something based on some ideas that had played in the back of my mind.

But after I wrote the first story, I decided I wasn't quite done—and the stories took on a life of their own. Together, they compose a story arc of their own, but also one very much tied to the larger Chronicles of Sarco storyline.

The characters from Tales occasionally cross paths with the people and events of the novels. They also unearth things which more fully explain why the things in the novels are happening as they are.

The payoff is that there are events alluded to in the novels that are fully explained in the short stories. There are also some

Easter eggs in the novels, including a couple of notable ones in *Through Chaos*, that pay homage to the stories.

Science fiction used to be an “insider” club for fans, but in the past decade or so has now become the mainstream. Does that make your job as an SF author easier or harder?

I think it's easier, and I say that as someone who grew up watching *Star Trek* when that was sort of a nerdy thing to do. I personally think that, on balance, the mainstreaming of science fiction has allowed for the larger population to experience these captivating stories that, for so long, were seen as only for a small group of social misfits.

Maybe for some purists it feels like something lost, but I really love the way the storytelling has continued to shine even as sci-fi has gotten more popular.

As an author, it means that there are more potential readers out there who have exposure to the kinds of worlds I build, and that's awesome.

In addition to SF, you've also written other kinds of stuff like this *Unofficial Guide to Shopping at Aldi*. First of all—um, what? What inspired you to start the website *Aldi Reviewer* and become an expert on the Aldi grocery chain? And how often do you run into people who need a guide?

One of my favorite authors is Isaac Asimov, who not only wrote some of the great science fiction—the *Foundation* series is my favorite—but also famously found his way into almost every section of the Dewey decimal system. He had a very wide array of interests and wrote about all of them. So I guess if one of the grand masters of sci-fi can write about

math or photosynthesis or biblical animals, nothing is too farfetched, right?

At any rate, the idea to write about Aldi came about as a result of conversations with my wife. She grew up shopping at Aldi, so she continued to do so when we got married. The problem was, when we saw things at Aldi, we often wondered if they were any good, but had no way to find out, because no one was talking a lot about most of this stuff, especially the appliances and tech and such. We saw a void there, and decided to pilot a blog that did Aldi product reviews, just to see where it went.

Aldi Reviewer went live in July 2016, just a few months after *Edge of Oblivion* released—and it has surpassed just about every expectation we had. In 2018, we hit one million lifetime pageviews, and the site continues to grow every day. And, of course, I penned a little nonfiction book to go along with it.

I want to also note, too, that the nonfiction writing has been really good changeup for my fiction writing. I credit blogging for Aldi Reviewer for helping me keep my brain fresh as I was drafting *Through Chaos* in the summer of 2016, and editing *Into the Void* in the fall of that year. But it's also been something that has come to stand nicely on its own.

In addition to those, you also write about video games and parenting. Given the range of categories, what determines what you're going to write next?

I have a writing spreadsheet that I keep where I note various ideas and prioritize them. There are certain core writing projects that I try to keep high up on the list—right now that would be Aldi Reviewer, my next novel (I am working on one),

and a little site my wife and I are testing out called *A Well Advised Life*—but I sprinkle in other things along the way.

For example, I bought a Nintendo Switch earlier this year, and it let me do some review writing for the Nintendo fansite Nintendojo, a site I've written on and off for since the mid-2000s. I also keep a couple of pet writing projects on the back burner, and I occasionally play around with them.

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

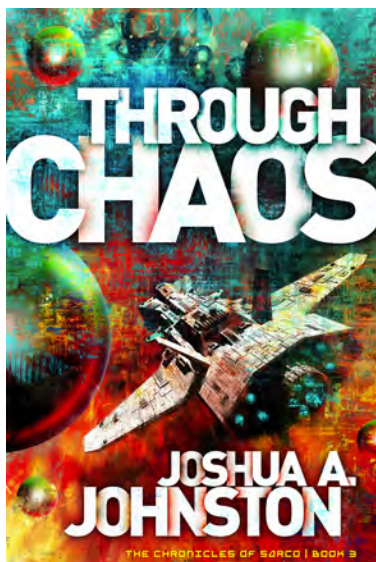
First and foremost, tell other people about them. Spreading the word is so important, since people can't read about what they don't know about. Word of mouth is a powerful thing for any author.

Secondly, buy their books. Get the physical ones, and put them on a shelf where your friends can see them when they come over. This supports the author financially, but also points back to the first point.

Finally, leave feedback for authors. Many people make book decisions based on the likes of Goodreads or Amazon, so leaving reviews there is incredibly helpful. **FF**

Visit Joshua A. Johnston's author page here:

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Through Chaos

The Chronicles of Sarco #3

Joshua A. Johnston

Enclave



A singular evil. An unlikely salvation.

Captain Jared Carter and the Navy cruiser Hattan have helped liberate an alien race from the clutches of darkness, but at a

terrible cost of lives and ships. While regrouping, they receive word that a shocking fate has befallen the Confederacy during the Hattan's distant campaign. Jared and his crew face the prospect that their home as they knew it is no more.

Danger now threatens them on two fronts: ahead, in the empire of the Domain, and behind, in the warring factions of the former Confederacy. The Hattan battle fleet must split up in hopes of combating both evils—their separate destinations leading to a singular enemy...

Discover more about Joshua A. Johnston's book here:

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Drawing from more than 30 years as writer/producer and on-air voice actor for the daily 15-minute radio broadcast *The Heartbeat of the Home*, **Cynthia Ruchti** now tells hope-filled stories through novels, nonfiction, devotionals, and at speaking events for women. In her novel ***Miles from Where We Started*** (Gilead Publishing), a married couple—whose marriage is on shaky ground—find themselves working through their issues on a crazy road trip.



In this interview, Cynthia talks about the origins of the story, why “road trips” make such great stories, and the best ways for readers to support their favorite authors.

Cynthia, *Miles from Where We Started* revolves around a couple that’s been married (almost) a year—and are struggling. What can you tell us about Mallory and Connor Duncan? What made you want to write their story?

Connor and Mallory are bright millennials who are stunned by the reality that a good marriage is a lot harder to pull off than they thought it would be. Hard work must mean they chose wrong, right?

They love each other, but can’t reconcile why their interests seem to collide rather than align. They’re passionate about their jobs, but the devotion sometimes gets in the way of their relationship.

The causes they believe in seem to share no common ground—except fear. Fear of failing the people counting on them.

Amy Lillard's latest Amish whodunit is ***Kappy King and the Pie Kaper*** (Zebra). Her amateur sleuth is Kathryn "Kappy" King, whose skill at making kapps for the Amish women of Blue Sky, Penn., is unparalleled. But she's also dangerously good at discovering dark truths beneath this peaceful valley!



In this interview, the author talks about her amateur sleuth, dishes about her latest mystery, and reveals her own favorite detectives

Amy, please tell us about your amateur sleuth Kathryn "Kappy" King.

I would love to! Kappy is the kapp maker for her community. It's a tedious job, which is why most Amish women buy them instead of sewing them at home.

But Kappy is also little quirky, kind of an outsider in her community. She teams up with Edie Peachey, her neighbor who was once Amish but left the community. Edie moves back to the valley and lives as English as she can in an Amish house with her Amish brother, Jimmy.

Jimmy has Down syndrome and often is the voice of wisdom for the three of them. The three unlikely friends make for a fun time even when solving a murder.

No spoilers, but what can you tell us about the mystery in Kappy King and the Pie Kaper?

Alma Miller, the bishop's wife and best pie baker in the community, is found unconscious in a mess of spilled flour. She was hit on the head and left for dead but managed to scrawl a cryptic message in the flour around her. Kappy tries to help Jack (local law enforcement) decipher the message hoping to uncover Alma's attacker.

But things get really serious when Alma suspiciously dies in the hospital. With the upcoming pie-baking competition looming ahead and champion baker Alma out of the running, Kappy has to uncover the killer. And help the judges decide if the pie is tasty enough to commit murder.

These are cozy mysteries set among the Amish. Do you have a background with the Amish or do you have to do research?

I don't have a background with the Amish but love doing research. I try to get to Lancaster once a year, and I've been to Kish Valley, Pennsylvania, twice now. That's where the series is set.

I have a website dedicated to all my Amish books and travels—www.amysamishadventures.com. It's a great place to see all the pictures I take during my research trips and the recipes I've collected along the way.

As a fan of the genre, who are your favorite amateur sleuths?

I love Sherlock Holmes, who doesn't? I really enjoy the Father Brown series by G. K. Chesterton and of course anything by Agatha Christie. I suppose you could say I love the classics!



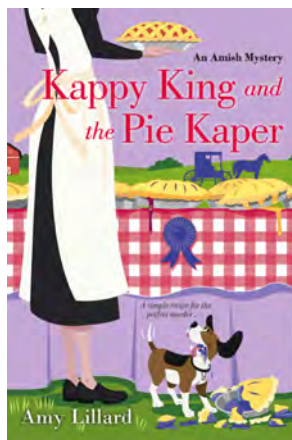
What are the best ways that readers can support their favorite authors?

There are many ways to support your favorite author online—sharing Facebook posts and reading blogs are just a couple—but the best way has always been to buy the book. Get it from the library. Tell others about it. Share it with a friend. Leave a review. The readers are what makes a book successful even in the digital age! **FF**

Visit Amy Lillard’s author page here:

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Amy Lillard



Kappy King and the Pie Kaper

Amish Mystery #3

Amy Lillard

Zebra



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In some ways, that means Connor and Mallory represent far more than their millennial demographic. They represent us all.

I longed to know more about what millennials offer, what concerns them, how their unique contributions can make us stronger. And I wanted millennials to know that many of us out here aren't criticizing but care about their stories and how they dovetail with ours, and with the grand story God is writing.

I specifically wanted to communicate that there's something for millennial readers in Christian fiction. That they're acknowledged, appreciated, and encouraged to dive in to discover what else is so great about Christian fiction as a reading option.

Tell us about what inspired their road trip—and the challenges therein...

Connor's ad agency's future depends on a successful road trip to test their key client's latest creation—the RoadRave version of a teardrop camper. Mallory's work with at-risk teens depends on the trip, too, and the RoadRave promise of a hefty donation to the youth center at the end of the trip.

Connor's business partner was supposed to be Connor's traveling buddy, but is detained at the last minute, dooming the backroads trip before it begins ... unless Mallory agrees to go. And take the business partner's troubled foster child/nephew with them.

A tough assignment is made tougher because the entire trip will appear on a daily video blog which demands the appearance of "happy campers" despite each characters' pain and flaws and the relationship dysfunction. They won't know their destinations until they get there, guided by up-to-the-minute guidance from the

RoadRave company. They're challenged to find ways to make a miniscule food budget stretch by taking odd jobs and relying on the kindness of strangers.

What could go wrong?

What is it about road trip stories that makes them such a great way to force characters together?

Laughingly, I was going to say, "There's no escape!" But the deeper truth is that time away from normal routines often sets us up for significant conversations.

Watching each other be resourceful can increase respect. Within a shared experience lies hidden beauty and wonder. The song Connor wrote for Mallory refers to that concept when he says, "The miles tick on ... and they take us far."

What do you hope readers will come away with after reading *Miles from Where We Started*?

The idea that "marriage is easy" is a myth. It takes commitment, devotion, and requires work or nurturing to keep it alive and thriving, whether the marriage is brand new, a year old, or decades old.

Many readers have commented that one of the quotes they're hanging onto is, "Forgive more than you think you should have to ... including yourself."

I hope readers will also emerge from the reading experience convinced that no matter how a relationship might have derailed, because of the hope we have in Christ, they can say, "This is not how our story ends."

What are your favorite ways for readers to support authors?

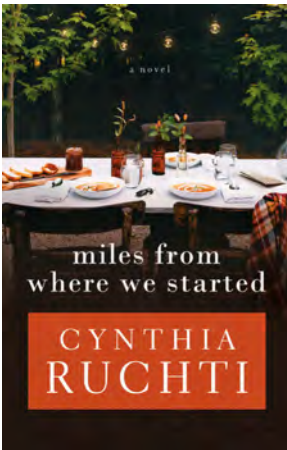
It's meaningful when readers purchase more than one copy and use the extra(s) to introduce someone else to the story and the author.

Reviews are so important. Many times readers think they have to be witty or loquacious or sound professional in their reviews, so they don't write and submit them. But even a couple of lines straight from the heart can help other readers discover a new book worth reading.

"Liking" on social media is wonderful. "Sharing" on social media is an author's dream. **FF**

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Miles from Where We Started

Cynthia Ruchti

Gilead Publishing



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Historical Sandra Byrd

Sandra Byrd is the author of 50 books, including a number of historical novels. Among her accolades for her work are the Historical Novel Society's Editor's Choice award, two Christy Award nominations, Library Journal Best Book selections, and inclusion on Booklist's Top Ten Inspirational Books of the Year list. Her latest novel is ***Lady of a Thousand Treasures*** (Tyndale House), the first book in her **Victorian Ladies** series.



In this interview, the author shares about the book's time and setting, what attracts her to write about the Victorian era, and how her faith impacts her storytelling.

Sandra, what can you share with us about the time and setting of *Lady of a Thousand Treasures*?

I'm a proud American but also have long admired the English and their history. England is the mothership for our language. British written historical records are so meticulously kept and go back so many centuries. They're treasure troves for a history lover.

The Victorian era is far enough back that it feels like a completely different time from ours, but not so far back that it's unrelatable. When I write, I enjoy writing books set both in the city and the countryside.

A recent walk down a London street turned into a discovery of a portion of a wall built in the Roman era. And then—those houses! I love those old stately homes in England, with their secret rooms and corridors, the back stairs and the front stairs,

the creaking hallways and the walls hung chock-a-block with pictures.

I enjoyed researching and writing about Venice, too. I think it's a place we don't often travel in fiction.

What inspired you to set the book where/when you did?

The elements of a good Victorian—a mysterious hero of whom we are not quite sure till the end, a heroine without parental support so she must stand on her own, the commingling of dark and light—all make for a compelling read. It doesn't hurt that it was such a long reign—lots of decades' worth of good material to discover.

My husband and I are devoted fans of British television and film. We are especially partial to the early seasons of *Jeeves and Wooster*. In one episode, the older men are after one another's silver collections, stooping to all manner of shenanigans to acquire them. Wodehouse uses humor, as always—the lowly silver cow creamer!—to wryly remark on an upper-class habit, the collecting of things and envy of others' possessions.

I knew I wanted to write a book on collections, because it's very British, and it's also something with which all of us can identify. We are all collectors, even of pennies or figurines and such, if not artwork.

I have always appreciated the V & A (Victoria and Albert Museum) just for its sheer size. And I enjoyed learning a wee bit about its predecessor, the South Kensington, and how some private collections came to partially populate museums. It's interesting to note that museums, as such, are a relatively modern construct, isn't it?



What about Miss Eleanor Sheffield made you want to tell her story?

Ellie had many difficulties thrust upon her, and yet did not allow herself to become a victim. Victorian women had major constraints, and the heroines in my books cannot just solve their problems as you or I might—but I love them the more for that; they are forced to cleverly use the tools at hand.

Truthfully, all of us, then and now, are constrained in some way from the full self-determination we would prefer, and perhaps that is one way we identify with them. And yet—the human spirit, a strong woman’s spirit, faces those challenges head-on, tries to think through what she wants, and then plots a way toward it.

When roadblocks occur, she finds a way over, around, or through. That was true a thousand years ago, and it is still true, now.

Also—we must all be risk-takers to gain what we want: love, respect, a meaningful life, and personal fulfillment. Today’s

readers certainly have that in common with yesterday's women, my historical heroines.

Ellie had to learn to do all of that and to trust herself. When she did, life unfolded for her!

What are your favorite things about writing historical fiction?

I love to travel to many places, but I also love to travel to many times, eras out of reach for a visit except through literature and film. I choose to write historical novels because, through them, we can time-and-place travel together.

As an author, I work hard to ensure that my heroines are actually of the era, so I don't allow one to take on a role for which I can't find an actual Victorian woman to emulate in some capacity.

I wanted Eleanor to be a curator and collector, to be an appraiser, to be good in her field. To ensure that she is not anachronistic, I first had to make sure there was such a woman in Victorian England. There was! Lady Charlotte Schreiber.

Lady Charlotte was an amazing woman in her own right. As such, she made an excellent friend and mentor to my Ellie. You can see some of Lady Charlotte's donations to the V & A and the British Museum, online.

Dante Rosetti was well known as both a man who enjoyed curiosities—a very Victorian pastime—and an artist in many mediums. He made a perfect addition to my book. I seek cameos, or even more substantive roles, by people who were not only of the time but organic to my book.

Weaving real people in and among my fictional characters is one of my favorite things about writing historical fiction because I believe it sets my readers right in the middle of the time and place, as it happened.

How does your faith impact how you approach storytelling?

In my own faith life, I've had the benefit of a "long walk in the same direction," to paraphrase the inimitable Eugene Peterson, and that walk has included breathtakingly beautiful experiences as well as plenty of skinned knees and dark nights of the soul (St. John of the Cross). I draw insight from both.

Friends and readers have shared their insights with me along the way, too, and their honesty bolsters me in my dry times, or even times of despair and God's seeming silence.

Fiction is not the place to teach or preach, but it's an amazing format to explore the inner workings of an individual's heart. God promises never to leave us or forsake us, and He reminds us He's a very present help in times of trouble.

However, God is not a helicopter parent. He lets us work things out because He trusts us, and we are adults. I like exploring that in my novels. **FF**

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Sandra Byrd



Lady of a Thousand Treasures
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Tamera Alexander's historical romances have been awarded and nominated for numerous industry-leading honors, including the Christy Award, the RITA Award, the Carol Award, and Library Journal's top distinction, among others. She kicks off her new **Carnton** series with the novel ***With This Pledge*** (Thomas Nelson):



What can a woman—a mere governess—do against the scourge of slavery?

In this interview, the author shares the overall theme of the series, what inspired her to set a series at the real-life Carnton Plantation, and what readers can expect from future books.

Tamera, your new Carnton series features Southern romance and real Civil War history set at Franklin, Tennessee's beloved Carnton Plantation. What inspired you to set a series in this time and place?

When I first heard about the Confederate sharpshooter and governess who met and fell in love during the aftermath of the Battle of Franklin at Carnton on November 30, 1864, I knew I wanted to breathe life into that piece of history. I'm a sucker for a real love story!

What can you tell us about the arc or theme of the series?

The Carnton Novels series begins with *Christmas at Carnton*, a novella I really enjoyed writing. As with all my Southern mansion novels, that story is rooted in real history. Specifically, that of

Tamera Alexander

Women's Aid Societies during the Civil War and how women had their own battle to fight on the home front.

The four books in this series all explore the indomitable strength of the human spirit in the face of extreme adversity, and of lasting hope that can be found only in Christ.

You've woven in historical details into *With This Pledge*. What kind of research did you do? How deeply entrenched into the narrative are these real accounts?

I love to research—and researching *With This Pledge* was especially gratifying. But I often wonder how Captain Roland Jones and Lizzie Clouston would feel knowing that their lives and love letters are the inspiration for a 21st century novel.

In researching and writing Roland and Lizzie's love story, I had the extreme pleasure of connecting with Captain Jones' great-great-great grandson, David. Quite a thrill for this history-loving author!

David shared the love letters between Roland and Lizzie with me, along with the family history—as did the wonderful folks at Carnton. This rich wealth of resources and intimate insights have made the writing journey for *With This Pledge* a wonderful one.

But it wasn't without its challenges. Weaving real history with fiction can be tricky. Add to that a cast of characters which is largely based on real people—and the challenges multiply!

Regarding the depth of truth in the story, the details of the Battle of Franklin are painstakingly accurate. With few



exceptions, every letter or military communique in the book is also true to history.

I provide a lengthy author's note in the back matter detailing these facts. I also have a "Truth or Fiction" page—located on *With This Pledge's* book page—that provides yet more information on the real history surrounding Carnton, Roland, Lizzie, all the other "real" characters in the book, and of course, the Battle of Franklin.

What about Lizzie Clouston made you want to build a story around her?

Once I learned the truth about what happened within the walls of Carnton that night of the battle and during subsequent weeks and months following, I was inspired to learn about the soldiers who fought in the battle, both those wounded and killed.

But I was also driven to learn more about the women in the house that night. Lizzie Clouston, Carrie McGavock, and the McGavocks' elderly cook—who is named Tempy in the book. What would those women have experienced? How would they have helped to care for so many wounded?

What does it feel like to see two opposing armies, each 20,000 strong, preparing to do battle in your own backyard, so to speak? And when the Federals unleashed that first avalanche of cannon and rifle fire, and the regiments of Confederate soldiers kept pushing forward...

What was it like, only moments later, to see your home fill to overflowing with 300+ bleeding, wounded, and dying men, not counting those soldiers who filled the yards and outbuildings?

With nearly 10,000 men wounded or killed in that five-hour battle, the Battle of Franklin is said to be the bloodiest battle of the Civil War. To be sure, the lives of everyone who lived through that horrific experience were never the same.

What can readers expect from future books in the series?

I'm writing the second full-length novel in The Carnton Novels series right now. It's about the formation of the McGavock cemetery, the largest privately owned Civil War cemetery in the nation.

It's fascinating history, which is only made more so by the real "Book of the Dead" at Carnton that records the near 2000 names of the hastily buried bodies of men who were killed in the battle and who were exhumed and reburied in 1866.

Tamera Alexander

I'm still researching the history of Carnton and Nashville for the third book. But the story promises to mirror the themes of restoration and reconstruction that are reflected in that particular era of our country's history. And, of course, there will be a love story! **FF**

Visit Tamera Alexander's author page here:

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Tamera Alexander



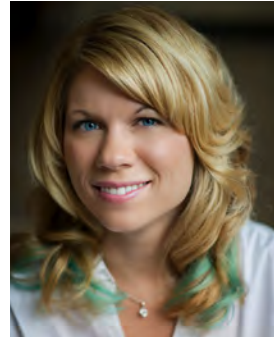
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Writer by day and a mother by night, **Morgan L. Busse** has authored the epic fantasy *Follower of the Word* series and the award-winning steampunk series *The Soul Chronicles*. She kicks off *The Ravenwood Saga* with ***Mark of the Raven*** (Bethany House).



In this interview, the author shares how the new series contracts with her other series, reveals a bit about her leading character, and explains the challenges of writing a fantastic world infused with a biblical worldview.

Morgan, *Mark of the Raven* kicks off a brand-new fantasy series. What can you tell about the world of *The Ravenwood Saga*?

It's a fantasy set in a world where seven Great Houses were given gifts to rule their people thousands of years ago. However, as the years went by, some gifts weakened, some were twisted, and one disappeared completely (or so people think).

Into this story comes Selene, oldest daughter and heir to the Great House of Ravenwood. On the day she inherits her gift of dreamwalking, she starts to discover how her family has hidden their gift from the rest of the world and uses it for hire, either to find out political secrets or to assassinate. Selene questions the use of their gift and searches for the real reason they were given the ability to dreamwalk.



How does this series compare/contrast with your previous series?

In this story I delve into family dynamics, politics, and the ultimate question of when we are given a gift, how do we use it? I've never written about families before, so that's been an interesting twist, and later on I will have a married couple, which has been a fun perspective to write from.

What can you tell us about Lady Selene? What do you consider the essential qualities of a leading character?

Selene is an intelligent, determined, and thinking character. Her strength is in her desire to do what is right, especially when everything around her is wrong. However, there is conflict in her choosing that path. If she doesn't fulfill her destiny, then it will be up to her younger sisters to fill her shoes, something she doesn't want to see happen.

I think the essential qualities of a leading character needs to be someone who critically thinks, weighs the pros and cons of their

actions, and is not satisfied with the status quo. Ultimately, the lead character is someone I want to be like someday, not perfect, but growing and learning.

How difficult is it for you to create a fantastical world infused with a biblical worldview? What are the challenges?

I am a finite human being, which means I will never be able to show God in all His glory and the facets of His being. That said, I always strive to present God in the most theological accurate way, and I want my readers to walk away from my stories with an overwhelming awe of God in their hearts.

I also portray sin as a brokenness in our lives, which only God, not ourselves, can heal. It is when we come to God and realize our need of Him that we can finally break free of our past and move forward as new creatures. That is how I infuse a biblical worldview into my stories.

What do you hope readers take away after reading *Mark of the Raven*?

Ultimately, I want readers to realize that it only takes one person to change a family, a city, a world. We are not destined to repeat the dark choices our ancestors made.

We each can choose, and God is there, a light in the darkness, who, when we come to Him in our brokenness, will make us new and use us to reach the world. **FF**

Visit Morgan L. Busse's author page here:

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Morgan L. Busse



Mark of the Raven
The Ravenwood Saga #1
Morgan L. Busse
Bethany House



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Lynn H. Blackburn believes in the power of stories—especially those that remind us that true love exists, a gift from the Truest Love. She continues her **Dive Team Investigations** series with ***In Too Deep*** (Revell), ramping up the romantic tension and action-packed suspense with an investigation that puts family loyalties to the test.



In this interview, the author explains her inspiration for the book, the research behind the criminal investigation, and what intrigues her about dive team investigations.

What was your inspiration for *In Too Deep*?

When I first developed this story, I knew I wanted it to have a human trafficking angle and I wanted Adam's family to be mixed up in it. But it was a very vague idea and I didn't know how it would come together.

Then I heard about the labor trafficking happening in my own city and how the Carolinas have a high number of people living in slavery right in front of us and we don't realize it. I can still remember the moment I knew this was the kind of trafficking the characters would be dealing with. It shook me in a way no other story I've written has.

What type of research was required for writing your book?

I interviewed a white-collar crimes investigator and a computer forensics expert, both of whom gave me valuable insights into



Adam's and Sabrina's characters. We talked about what they love about their jobs, what's challenging about their jobs, and what a day-in-the-life looks like for them.

I'm also fortunate to know a homicide investigator who graciously answers my procedural questions and a master underwater criminal investigator who helps me get the diving scenes right. I also spent a lot of time researching human trafficking—specifically labor trafficking in the Carolinas. It was the most difficult research I've ever done.

What intrigued you most when writing about dive team investigations?

The thing that is both the most intriguing and the most terrifying to me is how often the divers have little to no visibility. They are floating just above the bottom of a lake and searching with their hands. It takes a very special person to have the courage to do something like that.

Do you have a favorite character in your book?

The hero and heroine always get my love and devotion, of course. But after that, I'm very partial to the EMTs who, unfortunately for the main characters, get a lot of action in this novel! I think Clark and Dorothy might each have an interesting story. And Adam's parents, Art and Abby, were a lot of fun to get to know.

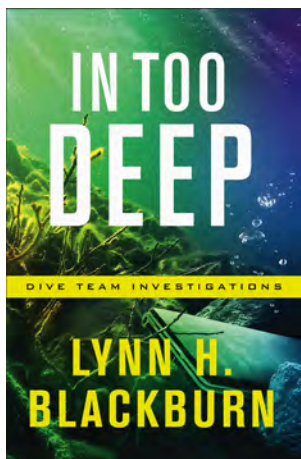
What do you hope readers gain from reading *In Too Deep*?

I always want my writing to encourage people in their faith—to help them remember that God is faithful and good. But with *In Too Deep*, I also hope readers come away with a new understanding of the very real issue of human trafficking in our country and seek out ways they can help in their own communities. **FF**

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Lynn H. Blackburn



In Too Deep

Dive Team Investigations #2

Lynn H. Blackburn

Revell



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J.A. Myhre serves as a doctor with Serge in East Africa, where she has worked for over two decades. She is passionate about health care for the poor, training local doctors and nurses, promoting childhood nutrition and development, and being the hands of Jesus in the hardest places. Her novel



A Fever, a Flight, and a Fight for the World (New Growth Press), is the fourth book in her *Rwendigo Tales* series.

In this interview, the author shares how a doctor in East Africa came to write the series, how her experiences have influenced the stories, and what connects the books together.

Jennifer, how did you come to write the *Rwendigo Tales* series?

Hi *FamilyFiction*, thanks for asking. When my own four children were younger, I decided to write them a story for Christmas. We lived in rural Uganda, near the Congo border, and I found that they had little to read that had any resonance with their actual experience.

They were all avid readers, so a new book seemed like a fun gift. For four years, I spent many months writing them a short novel which we would unwrap and begin reading aloud on Christmas Eve.



How have your experiences over there influenced or inspired these stories?

Each of the books is set in the Rwendigo region, a fictional area reflective of our East Africa experience. The words included in the glossary, the descriptions of the environment, and the characters and their back story are all true to the area in which we lived.

I also chose to wrap the stories around challenges which were pervasive in the atmosphere of our daily lives: separated families, the experience of being orphaned, search for identity, rebel incursion, struggles to obtain adequate food and education, HIV/AIDS, Ebola, environmental destruction, poaching, illegal logging, etc. That may sound heavy or depressing, but I think you will find that the stories normalize these themes and show children who overcome these issues.

Because the stories do not ignore the experience of the majority of children in the world, but choose to acknowledge their struggle and then celebrate their resilience, I hope that they empower children who read them to live with hope as well.

What inspired the specific story in *A Fever, a Flight, and a Fight for the World*?

We lived through an Ebola epidemic the year this book was written. Our best Ugandan doctor friend died caring for patients in the epidemic, so his memory and example influenced the story strongly.

What connects the books in this series together?

All of the books have a magical realism underpinning. There is a unified story of a mountain kingdom where truth and tradition have been preserved for the good of the surrounding region. Characters in each book are related to characters in another book.

Yet each book can stand alone. As the series progresses, the “Messengers,” who come to the children in the form of animals, become more subtle. As children grow up, they grow up they may no longer be open to a talking chameleon, but may see some guidance in the way a donkey shows up to lead them.

What do you hope readers come away with after reading *A Fever, a Flight, and a Fight for the World*?

I hope that my readers develop empathy for a part of the world they may have never seen. I hope they get lost in the drama of the story and enjoy the way it unfolds!

But afterward I hope they sense that they, too, could make hard and courageous choices to resist evil. I think the power of literature is to allow young people to truly understand another’s story, and to imagine themselves within it. **FF**

Visit J.A. Myhre’s author page here:

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J.A. Myhre



***A Fever, a Flight,
and a Fight for the World***

Rwendigo Tales #4

J.A. Myhre

New Growth Press

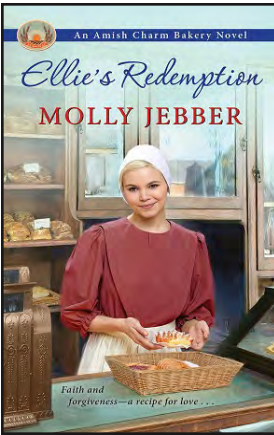
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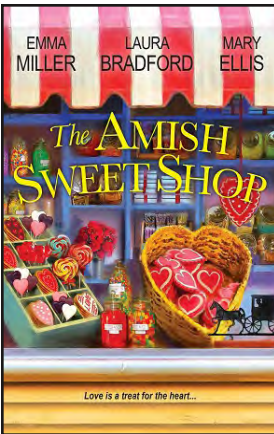
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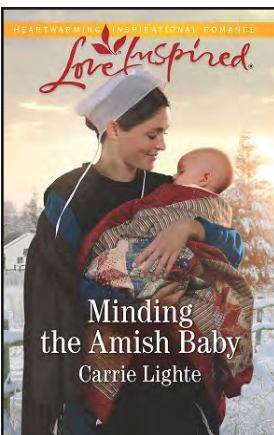
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Carrie Lighte

Love Inspired

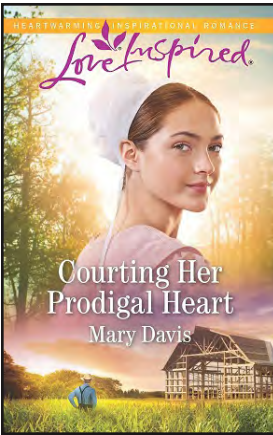
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New Releases: January 2019



Courting Her Prodigal Heart

Mary Davis

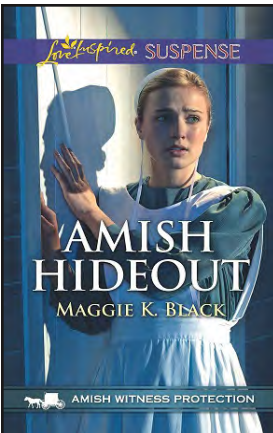
Love Inspired

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Amish Hideout

Amish Witness Protection

Maggie K. Black

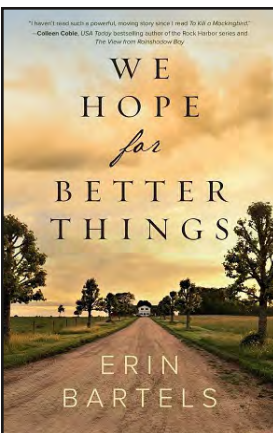
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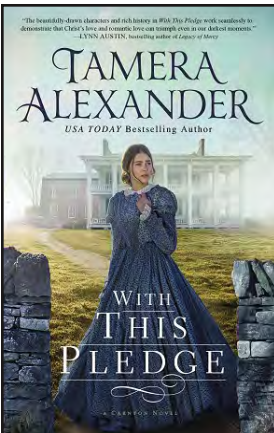
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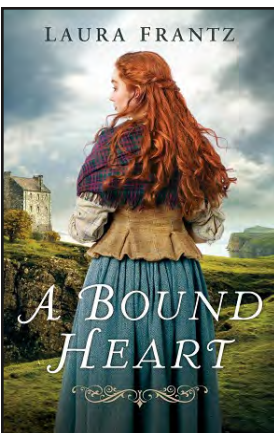
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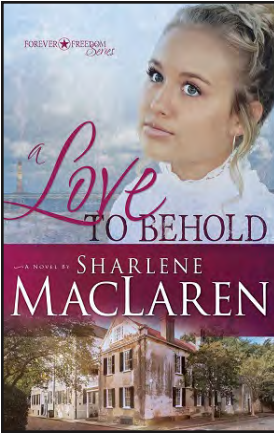
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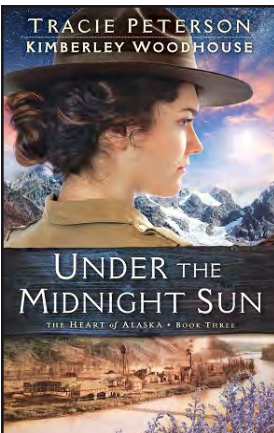
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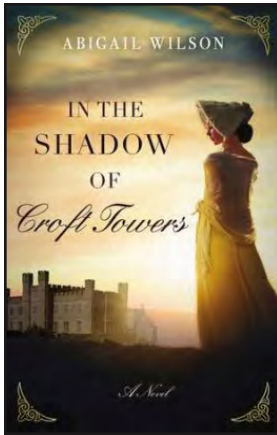
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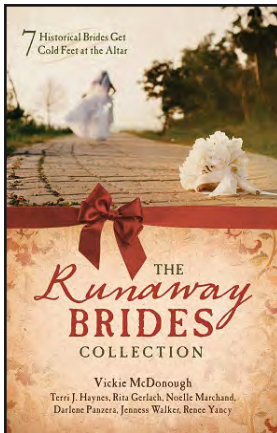
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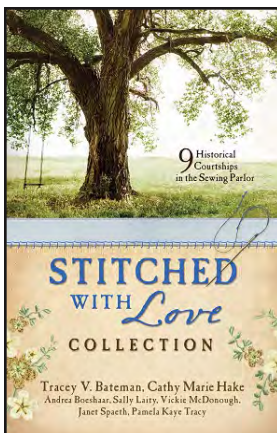
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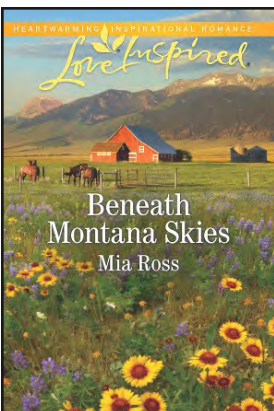
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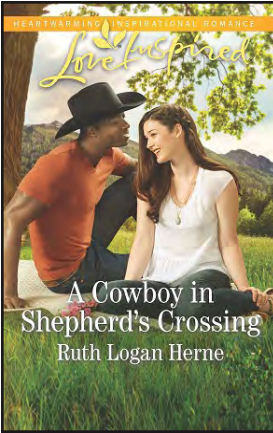
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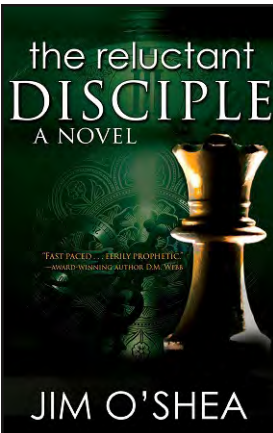
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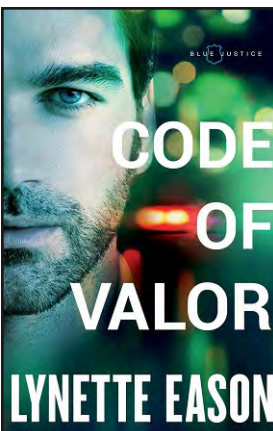
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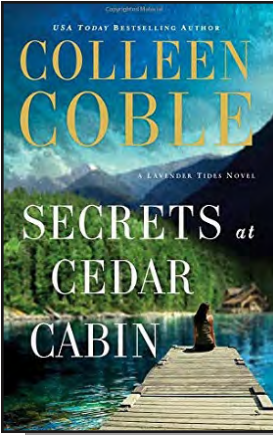
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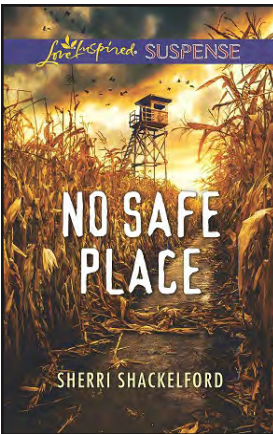
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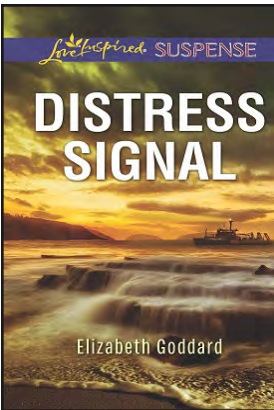
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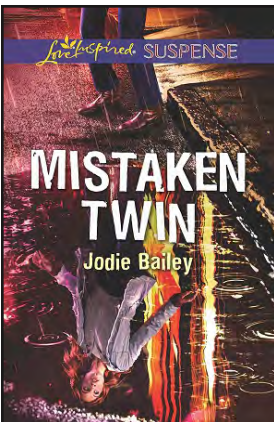
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