

# Family Fiction

March 2018



Children's Author  
**MIKE BERENSTAIN**

## **ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:**

**Terri Blackstock | Eric Wilson on *Samson***

**Angela Hunt on *Paul, Apostle of Christ***

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Dive into the

# DEPTHS OF FEAR

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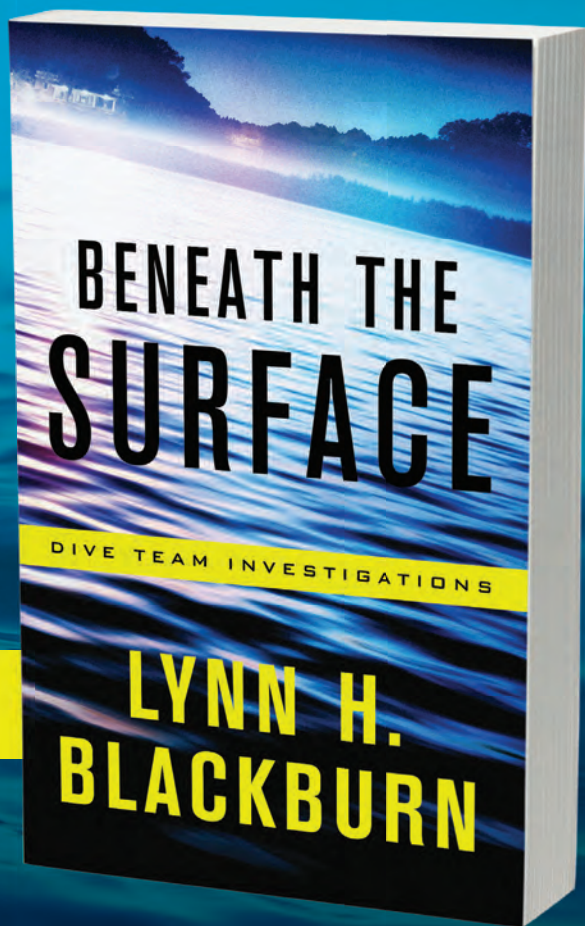
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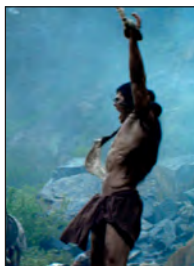
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## Features



### BERENSTAIN BEARS

As the beloved children's series continues after more than 55 years, **Mike Berenstain** talks about carrying on the family business and how you're really supposed to pronounce their last name.



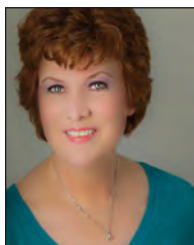
### SAMSON: THE NOVELIZATION

Author **Eric Wilson** outlines the challenges of writing a novel based on historical events, and reveals how his own feelings about Samson changed as he grew up.



### TERRI BLACKSTOCK

The thriller author shares childhood memories that sparked her *If I Run* series, why she chose to end the series, and why her faith is always woven into her stories.



### PAUL, APOSTLE OF CHRIST

**Angela Hunt** shares the value a storyteller can bring to the historical account, the parallels of ancient Rome and America, and what readers can learn from *Paul, Apostle of Christ*.

### On the Web: Christian Fiction News

Celebrating the film career of Billy Graham, Karen Kingsbury continues her Baxter family series, Ted Dekker takes readers back to the Circle, and Beverly Lewis takes her new novel on the road.

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## Genre Q&As & Spotlights



**AMISH**  
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Vannetta Chapman



**CONTEMPORARY**  
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**ROMANCE**  
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**CHILDREN'S**  
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## New Releases & Bestsellers

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## ON THE WEBSITE

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### **Billy Graham**

#### **Billy Graham on The Big Screen: 50 Years of World Wide Pictures**

Billy Graham's organization produced 100 films over 50 years—and led the way for a generation of Christian filmmakers.

#### **Read more here:**

<https://www.familyfiction.com/billy-graham-big-screen-50-years-world-wide-pictures>

### **Karen Kingsbury**

#### **Preview Karen Kingsbury's *To the Moon and Back* (Baxter Family #4)**

Find out about this unlikely love story about healing, redemption, hope and the belief that sometimes a new tomorrow can grow from the ashes of a shattered yesterday.

#### **Read more here:**

<https://www.familyfiction.com/authors/karen-kingsbury/books/244148>

### **Ted Dekker**

#### **Ted Dekker Comes Full Circle with 'The 49th Mystic'**

The thriller author will expand on his epic Circle saga with two brand-new novels this year.

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<https://www.familyfiction.com/ted-dekker-comes-full-circle-49th-mystic>

### **Beverly Lewis**

#### **Beverly Lewis Hits the Road for *The Road Home***

To support the launch of her latest novel, Lewis will be embarking on her biannual book tour with 23 stops.

#### **Read more here:**

<https://www.familyfiction.com/beverly-lewis-hits-road-road-home>



# CHILDREN'S: Berenstain Bears

## Keeping the Family Tradition

**Mike Berenstain** talks about the legacy and the future of the **Berenstain Bears**.

After more than 55 years, everyone's favorite Bear family continue to be as popular as they were when husband-and-wife author/illustrator duo **Stan** and **Jan Berenstain** launched the children's series in 1962. The companion series Living Lights—featuring the Berenstain Bears in faith-based children's books—has also proven a bestseller, with more than five million copies sold. Today, their son Mike continues to delight children with new Berenstain Bears projects.

In this exclusive interview, Mike tells *FamilyFiction* about the origins of the series, how he makes new Berenstain Bears titles, his personal favorite out of all the books his parents made—and how you're really supposed to pronounce the family name.

**Can you tell us a little about your parents' backgrounds? Maybe how they became acquainted and the illustration work they did prior to the bear series?**

The Berenstain family were Jewish immigrants from the Ukraine in the 1880s. Stan's grandfather, Berenstain, was a blacksmith. His son, Harry—Stan's father— worked as a clerk in an army-navy store. He later opened his own store, eventually owning several in the Philadelphia area.

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My mother's maiden name was Grant. Her family was a Scottish, Irish, German mix. According to family records most of them arrived in America in the early 19th Century. The last arrival was her grandfather Grant—a carpenter who trained his son, my grandfather, in the craft. My mother was brought up Episcopalian.

Stan and Jan were both born in 1923. They both lived in West Philadelphia but went to different schools or they might have met much earlier. They grew up during the Great Depression and their families experienced much financial hardship.

But both felt they had very happy childhoods. They enjoyed school, they liked to read, they like sports, but, most of all, they loved to draw. Drawing and art became an increasingly important part of their lives as they moved on to junior and senior high school. Stan's family remained in West Philly but Jan's family moved to the suburbs.

They first met in Miss Sweeney's Drawing Class on the first day of art school, 1941. It was their drawings of classical plaster casts that attracted their interest in each other. They started off admiring each other's drawings and wound up admiring each other.

Their mutual art talent led both of them to scholarships to the Philadelphia Museum School of Industrial Art (now, the University of the Arts), which finally brought them together in the autumn of 1941. There was time for romance to briefly flourish before Pearl Harbor.

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## Berenstain Bears

My father was drafted into the Army in World War II in spite of being blind in one eye. He had amblyopia as a child, which was never treated. It turns out lots of men who were blind in one eye were drafted and given specialized basic training. The idea was to have these men take on non-combat military duties to free up more of the fully two-eyed to be sent overseas.

He wound up at a military hospital in Indiana, where he spent most of the war as a medical illustrator recording facial reconstruction operations on wounded soldiers.

While Stan was in the Army, Jan served on the civilian front as a riveter in an aircraft factory. After two weeks of training, she joined the workforce at a former trolley car factory which was assembling center wing sections for Navy PBY seaplanes.

As a medical illustrator, Stan took advantage of his few spare hours to try his hand at the creation of cartoons. He tried sending a batch of these on literary and artistic themes to a magazine he found in the base library, *The Saturday Review of Literature*.

He was surprised and delighted to receive in reply a \$140 check for four cartoons. Encouraged by this largesse, he began cranking out a series of cartoons about sculptors, painters, and poets.

Stan was discharged from the Army on April 1, 1946. He and Jan were married 10 days later by a magistrate in a storefront courtroom on South Broad Street, Philadelphia. After being separated for more than three long years, Stan and Jan were eager to start a career in which they could work together as a team.

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Freelance cartooning seemed a good possibility. So they took up residence in a ramshackle apartment atop Stan's father's army-navy store in a tough neighborhood of Southwest Philly. First they simply signed their work, "Berenstain," and sent out cartoons to all the leading magazines.

But they soon discovered that the only leading magazine that bought any of their offerings was *The Saturday Review of Literature*. They were able to sell a few spot illustrations to the book review of the local newspaper and, significantly for their later career, some of these featured images of children reading. But these and other odd jobs could scarcely pay the bills of even their starving-artists lifestyle.

Eventually, they began experimenting with cartoons about everyday life—about families and kids. As a newlywed couple, they had limited firsthand experience as spouses and none as parents. But they certainly had a great deal of experience growing up in families—what's more, in large extended families surrounded by the teeming, child-packed neighborhoods of Depression-era Philadelphia.

They knew a lot about kids. Why not, they reasoned, use their own childhood experiences as the basis for cartoons? Their earliest efforts dealt with tried-and-true childhood themes like making mud pies. But their distinctive style began to emerge. They started to come up with cartoons that conveyed a uniquely childlike perspective on family life.

These cartoons struck a nerve. First *The Saturday Evening Post*, then *Collier's* and then a host of other magazines began buying them. When a savvy editor pointed out the fact that they

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were a husband-and-wife team was a good publicity angle, they changed their byline to “The Berenstains” and a historic 60-year-long partnership devoted to chronicling family life began. The Baby Boom is defined as the steep increase in the birth rate which occurred between 1946 to 1964. Stan and Jan were in the thick of it, not only as cartoon chroniclers of the generation, but as active participants. They contributed their own first shot to the Boom in early 1948 with the birth of their son Leo.

At this time, they began to focus their efforts on a tomboyish, wisecracking little girl they called, simply, Sister—a cartoon everyone could connect with.

People sometimes ask where the idea of naming the Berenstain Bears by their family roles, “Papa,” “Mama,” “Brother,” and “Sister” came from. They seem to assume it has some subversive ideological import relating to their origin in the turbulent 1960s. But the fact is it came out of the world of 1940s American family magazines where kids were generically dubbed “Butch” or “Skip” or “Sis”—just another average all-American kid.

In 1950, having achieved some financial success, they decamped their tar-papered shack of a city apartment for a modern house in a green and leafy Philadelphia suburb. There they let off the second and final volley of their own personal Baby Boom with my arrival in late 1951.

Stan and Jan’s rising professional profile drew the attention of an editor at Macmillan. Since they were so good at creating cartoons about kids, he wondered; why not try their hands at a book on the subject, as well? *Dr. Spock’s Baby and Child Care* book was, of course, the bible of child-rearing in the early Fifties and

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seemed a natural target for a disrespectful spoof. Thus was *Berenstains' Baby Book* born, soon to be followed by a sequel, *Baby Makes Four*, and several other child-rearing-themed books.

In their magazine cartoons, Stan and Jan focused on a series called *It's All in the Family* (no connection to the later TV sitcom), which appeared in *McCall's* and *Good Housekeeping*. I had the good fortune to work on the feature in its last few years under my parents' close (and strict) supervision. We finally decided to retire the feature in 1988.

Of course, by then, the hugely popular Berenstain Bears children's book series, which made its debut in 1962, had come to dominate the creative life of my parents and, later, myself.

### **Tell us how The Berenstain Bears series began...**

The transition from cartoons about children to books for children was a natural one for Stan and Jan. As parents themselves, they were interested and critical consumers of

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children's books. Their professional interest was aroused, as well, when many former cartoonists came into prominence in the children's book field during the early Sixties.

Most prominent of all was Theodore Seuss Geisel, also editor and publisher of the new Random House Beginner Books line, an outgrowth of Geisel's groundbreaking early reader, *The Cat in the Hat*.

Stan and Jan decided to try their hands at the creation of a children's book and found the result good. When they submitted it to Dr. Seuss, he agreed with them.

"Ted" became their first children's book editor as well as their chief exhorter, mentor, fan and, at times, task master in their newly chosen careers as children's authors and illustrators. They created about 20 books with Geisel, and then went on to produce about 200 more over the next 40-odd years.

The character of their relationship with Ted was established at their first meeting with the great man. "I like your bears," Ted began. "I think they're fun. I like the idea of family. And..." he added, encouragingly, "I love your drawings. But I need to know more about them. Who are these bears? What does Papa do for a living? What kind of pipe tobacco does he smoke?"

To my parents' considerable discomfiture, Ted proceeded to subject their simple children's story to an analysis worthy of his literary studies at Oxford in the 1920s. In other words, he ripped it apart.

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They finished up their session with handshakes and Ted's query, "How long do you think it'll take for the next draft?" After a long, long series of drafts, sketches, and layouts, the first Berenstain Bears book, *The Big Honey Hunt*, was published in the spring of 1962.

### **How did the decision come about to include your family name in the title of the series?**

It was Dr. Seuss's fault. He put a banner on the cover of their second book, *The Bike Lesson*, saying, "ANOTHER ADVENTURE OF THE BERENSTAIN BEARS."

He explained it was like a vaudeville act—as in "Dugan's Dogs" or "Charlie's Chimps." He also shortened their names from Stanley and Janice Berenstain to Stan and Jan Berenstain, because that is what they call each other and plus, it rhymes.

### **Were your parents surprised by the popularity of the series? Why do you think the bears are still so popular 55 years later?**

The answer to the first question is simply, yes. As to the second, I believe there are a number of reasons. For one thing, bears as children's book characters are a natural stand-in for people. They are something like people but not too much like them. They have rounded heads with eyes in front, they sometimes stand on their hind legs and they manipulate things with hand-like paws. We often say of large, burly people that they are "bear-like."

But bears are definitely animals. They are analogous to human beings without being like them.

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Children are fascinated by large, powerful animals like bears. But they are threatened by them, as well. The role of bears as semi-human children's book characters may help reassure children about their own position in the food chain.

My family's own contribution to the literary bear clan has come to be universally identified with what may cautiously be described as "family values." American moms, pops and kids know and trust our characters as guides to the overwhelming task of attempting to become a sane, secure, and well-adjusted family.

We have received countless letters and comments from parents and their offspring who have found our books helpful in getting over those proverbial rough spots in the bob sled run of family existence.

It was, I hasten to add, never our intention to take on this role of do-it-yourself family counselors. We prefer to leave serious psychologizing to the duly designated, licensed and recognized professional authorities. But, now, we're pretty much stuck with it.

People are always telling us that they like our books because "they teach good lessons." I beg to quibble with this well-meant characterization. I think people actually like our books because "they teach lessons good."

The ethical messages of our books are not very original. They lean heavily on such standbys as the Golden Rule. Their appeal comes, rather, from the way in which this familiar material is presented.

We have worked very hard to make our books funny and visually enriching. We've tried to make our characters fully dimensional and recognizable. And we've tried to tell good stories. Our books actually have plots—not as convoluted as Harry Potter, admittedly—but, still, good for turning a few pages.

### **How do you choose your topics for each story? Are they more based on your own experiences or on what's happening in our culture at a given time?**

They are a combination of both. The children's books we've created have much in common with the child-themed cartoons my parents created in the 1950s to '70s. Many of the subjects, even the specific jokes and situations, which appeared in Berenstain Bears books had been pioneered with a human rather than ursine cast on the pages of *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Collier's* and *McCall's*.

As they progressed with their popular Berenstain Bears series, Stan and Jan began to branch out from the zany, slapstick style of their early work with Seuss to more naturalistic subject matter. The first of these was *The Berenstain Bears' New Baby*, the precursor of a line of bestselling paperback books on themes about family life.

Such titles as *The Berenstain Bears Go to School*, *Visit the Dentist*, *Get in a Fight* and *Learn about Strangers* became immensely popular during the 1980s and continue as bestsellers to this day. The everyday world of family life is infinite in its variety and richness. It will always provide a fertile ground for Berenstain Bears stories.



**Would you speak to the challenges of creating content for kids in a culture where internet and video games rule, and values and the concept of family seem to be constantly shifting?**

This is not, actually, all that challenging. The Berenstain Bears have never aimed to be superficially “relevant” on the short-term contemporary scene. When they were introduced in 1962, people did not actually live in tree houses, go bear-foot, or consume massive quantities of honey.

The 1960s weren't like that—I know, I was there. The world of Berenstain Bear Country aims to be relevant in a broader, grassroots way—dealing with the universal values of personal relationships, and that really doesn't change from year to year.

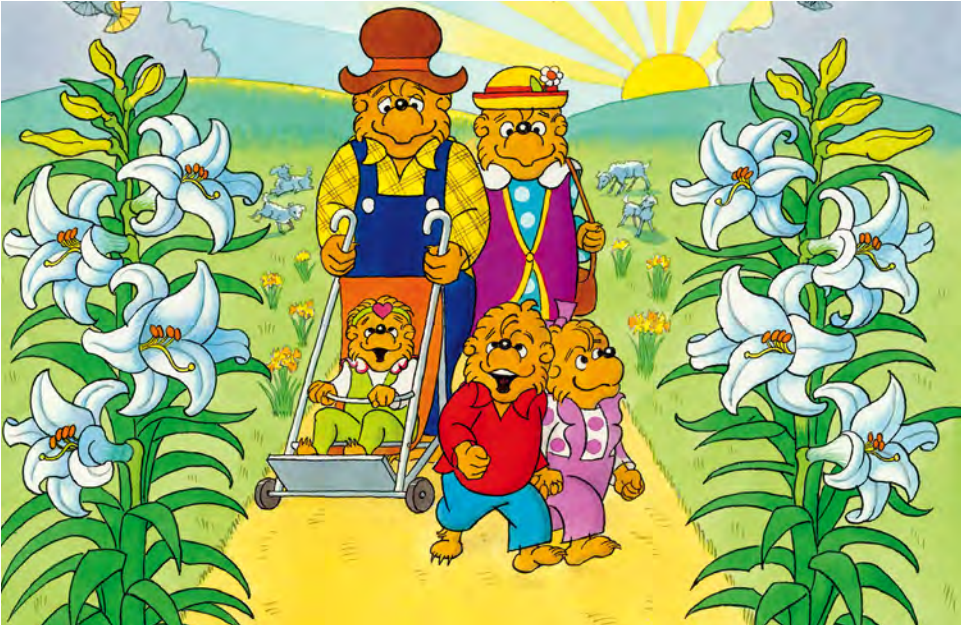
**What made you decide to launch the Living Lights series, and were your parents supportive?**

My father's last big professional undertaking involved the airing, in 2003, of our PBS animated show. This was a major event in itself, but also led to seismic shifts in publishing relationships.

When the TV show came along, my father naturally assumed that our publisher, Random House, would be eager to expand their Berenstain Bears publishing program to coordinate with the show's premier. This was an obvious marketing strategy. Unfortunately, Random House, due to a heavy investment in the acquisition of Disney licenses, did not have the budgetary flexibility to make this happen.

My father felt that this would represent a tragically missed opportunity—and, so, with a great deal of trepidation, we

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made the move, after 40 years with Random House, to our new publishing home at HarperCollins. Their expanded and imaginative new line of Berenstain Bears books was immediately successful and has grown by leaps and bounds ever since, rejuvenating and invigorating the brand.

I was aware that HarperCollins' Christian division, Zondervan, was prominent in the industry. It seemed a good idea to try some spiritually themed books as a separate Zondervan line. This was personally relevant to me as an expression of my own faith, and my parents were supportive since they knew that many Christian families are enthusiastic fans of our books. We proposed the new Living Lights series, which was launched with great success in fall 2008. The line has continued to expand and thrive.

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**Did you always want to be a writer and illustrator growing up, or did you have different aspirations as a child?**

I had always loved to draw but for most of my childhood was mainly focused on science—especially natural history. I was an insect-collecting, microscope-peering, anemometer-on-the-roof sort of kid.

I first got interested in art in a serious way in high school. I had a history class which covered Renaissance art. The teacher showed us slides of such famous paintings as Botticelli's "The Birth of Venus," Massacio's "The Tribute Money" and Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel frescoes.

I well remember the impact these paintings had on me. It was like a light bulb going off inside my head.

My parents had a large library of art books and I began to study them for the first time. I also went to museums—often with my father, who was very knowledgeable about art history—and I began to try to paint. In this, I had the encouragement and guidance of both parents.

**Tell us a little about the style of illustration. What influenced the style when your parents began creating the books, and how has the illustration changed over the years?**

I'll answer this with an anecdote. When I began working with my parents as an illustrator, the Berenstain Bears style book was kept entirely in my mother's head. She was the ultimate authority on just how the characters should look, move, and act.

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An incident early on in my work on the books illustrates this fact. I had created a sketch version of a book and given it to my mother to look over for any changes or improvements needed in the drawing. She informed me that the sketches looked fine except for one problem. The Bears' ears, she pointed out, were all too low—they should be shifted up a little higher on their heads. I accepted this pointer and, when I got the sketches back to my studio, set about to correct them.

But as I studied the sketches, I grew increasingly puzzled. The ears certainly didn't look too low to me—how could I be so mistaken about so simple a point of drawing?

So, I got out dozens of copies of earlier Berenstain Bears books and studied the position of the ears on the Bears' heads. As I did this, my perplexity deepened. Finally, I got on the phone and called my mom.

"Mom," I said. "It's fine with me if you want me to move the Bears' ears up a little. But I've been checking the ears on all your old books and I can't figure it out—it looks to me like I've drawn the ears exactly where they always have been."

"That's right," my mom shot back. "They've always been too low. Your father always draws them too low and I'm tired of it. They need to be a little higher."

Okay, Mom, you're the boss!

### **What is your goal in writing these stories?**

There are several: First, I want the books to achieve a specific creative standard. That is, I want the story and illustrations to conform to my own mental model of that which is satisfying and pleasing in a children's book.

Second, I want to create books that are popular. This is partly because I have no desire to do books just for myself—I want my work to be appreciated by a wide audience—and, also, because I want the books to sell. After all, this is what I do for a living.

Third, I want the books to be a positive influence in people's lives. This is not because I'm some sort of aggressive, ideologically driven do-gooder, but because the alternative—to be a negative influence—seems unattractive.

### **Do you have a favorite Berenstain Bears book?**

I have always had a soft spot in my heart for one of the early stories, *The Bears' Picnic*, published in 1966. This is partly because it nostalgically reminds of my own childhood and watching it being created in my parents' studio.

But, partly, because I just find it very amusing and entertaining—especially the hilarious scenes of various mishaps occurring to poor Papa Bear—getting garbage dumped on his head or actually being struck by lightning. Papa is a survivor!

**I read a few years back that you visit schools and speak to students. What do you talk to them about, and what do you enjoy most about those visits?**

I always like to read them one of the books and give them a demonstration of how to draw the Berenstain Bears. Kids like to watch you draw. But what I enjoy most is talking to kids during book signings. The bookstore people always want to rush kids through this to get as many books signed as possible so it can degenerate into author-as-signing-machine.

But the nice part is talking to them. They're very funny. As when a kid comes up wearing a big Star Wars T-shirt and I say, "So, you're a Star Wars fan, huh?" It's wonderful to watch the look of mystified astonishment that comes over the kid's face—"How does he know that? He's a mind reader!"

When it is pointed out to him that it actually says "Star Wars" right on his shirt, the way in which he will grab the shirt to turn it around to look at it and confirm the fact that it does, indeed, say, "Star Wars" right on his shirt—a detail he'd forgotten since he put it on that morning.

**Tell us a little bit about the origin of the Stan & Jan Berenstain Healthy Kid Foundation and what it does.**

The Stan and Jan Berenstain Healthy Kids Foundation is named in honor of my parents and inspired by the childhood-celebrating and family-affirming message of their life's work. The Foundation receives ongoing financial support from the Berenstain family.

The book *The Berenstain Bears' Hospital Friends* was published to celebrate the launch of the Foundation. This represents a

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fulfillment of our long-cherished dream of adding a story about visiting the hospital to the Berenstain Bears series, which has for decades been a source for children coping with new experiences and difficult health problems.

For years, this dream remained on the back burner. But when I married pediatric cardiac anesthesiologist Dr. Laura Diaz—a.k.a. Dr. Laura Berenstain—we immediately began making it a reality. With Laura's help, I toured the hospital where she worked, interviewed staff, and used sketches made in every medical department to create the illustrations. The book seeks to make the hospital a more comfortable place for children to enter, as patients or as visitors, and highlights the skills and dedication of a whole array of medical professionals.

The Foundation's newest partnership is with the Heart to Heart Foundation. This came about, in part, through the efforts of Laura, who was part of a team of medical personnel organized by Heart to Heart to travel to Tomsk in Siberia to train Russian pediatric cardiac teams in surgical techniques. Heart to Heart is expanding their program to Peru and asked the Berenstain Foundation to provide support and funding for this effort.

In June of 2017, I accompanied a group of doctors from Heart to Heart that included Laura on a trip to Peru to provide life-saving heart surgeries to Peruvian children who otherwise would not have access to such high-level health care. Upon arrival to INCOR (the Peruvian National Hospital located in Lima,) The Heart to Heart team jumped into action and was busy training the INCOR staff, participating in lectures and presentations on various ventricular diseases, and assisting in surgeries.

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Meanwhile, I documented much of the trip in a sketchbook, capturing the team interacting with INCOR staff, prepping for surgery, and [caring for] patients in recovery.

### **What is the most surprising thing that has happened as a result of the series' creation?**

I've been most surprised by the controversy which has grown up over the spelling and pronunciation of our family name. It's always been spelled, "BerenstAin" not "BerenstEin." It's pronounced as it is spelled, "Beh-ren-stane," as in "coffee stain" or "ink stain" or "grape juice stain." Exactly how this particular spelling came about, we don't know. It's been spelled that way ever since my great-grandparents got off the boat. Perhaps it was just an attempt to phonetically reproduce "Berenstein" as expressed in a heavily Slavo-Yiddish accent—something like, "Behrrrn-sheytn" which is how my father said his grandmother pronounced it.

If you go online, you will find that many believe that our name actually is "Berenstein"—but in an alternate reality. They think all the books originally said "The Berenstein Bears" but, at some point in the past, they spontaneously switched over to the "Berenstain" spelling. I'm sure that a quantum physicist could explain this, but none of us would be able to understand the explanation.

### **What is the most unusual product that has featured the Berenstain Bears?**

A while back they made a set of Berenstain Bears View-Master slides—those goggles you look through at circular slides. I really liked View-Master as a kid. This was before cable TV, DVDs, the internet, etc. so our options were limited.



### **Can you tell us about any upcoming Berenstain Bears stories?**

A new book in our Zondervan line and one in our HarperCollins series are both about to be released. With Zondervan, there's *The Berenstain Bears' Father's Day Blessings*, about the cubs giving Papa and Grizzly Gramps a happy and peaceful Father's Day. With HarperCollins, there's *The Berenstain Bears Long, Long Ago*, about a trip through time in Professor Actual Factual's Anytime-Anywhere Machine to learn about the past.

### **Any final thoughts?**

People naturally assume that there is a close connection between my own family and the Berenstain Bear family. People often ask me, "Are you Brother Bear?" The answer is, "No, I have an older brother, so I must be Sister Bear." This always seems to be good for a laugh.

But some go on to explore the mysterious relationship between fact and fiction. "Then who was Sister Bear?" they wonder. "Wasn't there a girl in your family?" On being informed that, as far as I can remember, there were never more than just the two male siblings, they are puzzled. "But," they ask, "why didn't your parents write about a family with two brothers?"

The inclusion of both a girl and a boy in a fictional children's book family to appeal equally to girls and boys seems an obvious choice. In addition, why would it be assumed that a fictional family of talking, clothes-wearing bears would closely mimic the real-life circumstances of their human creators?

Are we surprised to learn that Shakespeare did not, himself, live in a castle in Denmark and spend his days accosting ghosts and talking to skulls? I'm just putting it out there. **FF**

Visit our Berenstain Bears page here:

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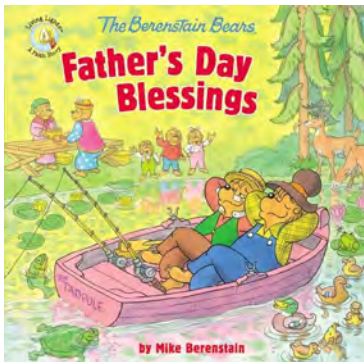
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***The Berenstain Bears'  
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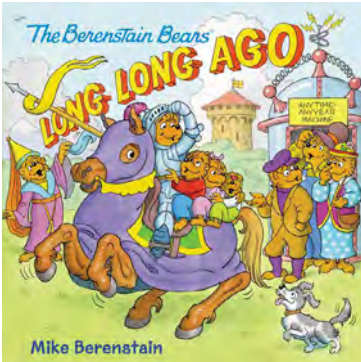
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Mama, Gran, and the cubs plan an adventure to honor Papa Bear and Gramps on Father's Day. Papa Bear and Gramps are the best dads in

Bear Country and the cubs want to show their love. Working

## Berenstain Bears

together with Mama and Gran, a special fishing trip and picnic are planned for Father's Day. Will Papa and Gramps bring in a big catch of fish—or will they catch something else even better?



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Hop aboard the Anytime-Anyyear Machine with the beloved Berenstain Bears! The Bear family travels back in time, and what a sight it

is! They get to see mummies up close in ancient Egypt, cheer loudly during a medieval jousting match, dine at the very first Thanksgiving, and more. What will the cubs learn about history through the Anytime-Anyyear Machine?

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## MOVIES/DVDS: Eric Wilson

### **Taking Samson from Scripture to Screen to Print**

**Eric Wilson** talks about the challenges of adapting the true-life adventures of Samson—and why the account is more relevant than ever.

The true-life story of the original superhero is being retold to a new generation, both as the motion picture *Samson* in theaters, and as a novelization from *New York Times* bestselling author **Eric Wilson**. Based on the historical account from the Bible, a young Hebrew with a supernatural gift of strength is called by God to lead his people out of enslavement from the Philistine empire.

In this interview, Eric outlines the challenges of writing a novel based on historical events, shares how his own feelings about Samson changed as he grew up, and compares writing novelizations with writing his original novels.

**Eric, your novel is an interpretation of a screenplay that is itself an interpretation of the Scriptural record. As you wrote *Samson*, were you following the screenplay or the Bible?**

My first priority in any of my novels is to honor God through creativity. Being true to Scripture takes precedence.

Thankfully, the screenplay followed the biblical account, while throwing in various scenes and subplots that were still faithful to the heart of the Bible story. Some have asked, “Why write Samson’s story? People should just read the Bible.”

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Reading the Bible is first and foremost, but if that was the only way we learned, we would never listen to a pastor's sermon, because we wouldn't need his research, knowledge, experience, or interpretation. As a writer, I hope to use gifts and experience God has given me to help readers see things from a fresh angle.

### **What are the challenges of creating a work of art that's an interpretation of historical events—especially when the historical record really just hits the highlights of what happened?**

We have so much we can learn from history, but yes, we are often only seeing the highlighted bits. We imagine, for example, that Abraham Lincoln was a man of honesty, courage, and integrity, but only if we dig deeper do we begin to understand his childhood, his marriage, and the choices he made that led to greatness.

While writing a story rooted in history, I wanted to bring that time period to life, make it fresh, and help readers see how the choices made then have parallels to choices we face today. Ultimately, the issues of the heart haven't changed.

### **What kind of research did you need to do to get the historical details right?**

I have a bachelor's degree, with high honors, in Biblical Studies. I used that background to build my story, reading Scripture, studying the context of Samson's story and location.

I read hundreds of pages of research regarding life, farming, food, and customs of that time period, as well as an entire book about the Philistines and their influence in that day and age.

As readers flip the pages, I want them to feel that it is believable and true to that period, but I also want them to speed through without getting bogged down in details.

**How do you get into the right mindset to write a novel about people we know from the Bible? Does the fact that this is the Bible make it harder than if you were writing a novel about, say, Abraham Lincoln or Marie Curie?**

I don't know that writing about a story from the Bible makes it harder than other historical figures or eras, so much as it adds weight to the responsibility. I want to get it right. I need to get it right. This is God's Word we're dealing with, and I don't want to add or take away from its message. But I do want to highlight and bring new perspective to the messages it already contains.

**Even though the outline of the story was laid out before you started, was there anything that surprised you in the course of writing this novelization?**

As a kid, I loved Samson's heroic fighting. It was larger than life.

Reading through the story now as an adult, as a husband, as a father, brought parts of the story into more focus. I kept wondering how it would feel to be Samson's parents, knowing that he had a call on his life, but watching him seem to squander it and take wrong turn after wrong turn. I delved into that side of the story.

And regarding Samson, I didn't want him to come across as some lumbering oaf who just wants to crack skulls together. I chose to write his scenes in first-person, present tense, giving them more immediacy and insight. This helped me get into his



head more and understand the way his experiences led naturally to his choices, both bad and good.

**What is it about the life of Samson that still makes him so important to modern audiences?**

Nobody sets out to be a moron. Nobody dives headlong into sin without ever making earlier mistakes. Through Samson, we get a cautionary tale, seeing how little choices he made led to larger mistakes.

And we also see how God is still willing to work through us and complete the good work He has begun, even after we fall. It's so easy, especially as men, to get caught up in pride, strength, lust, and then to isolate ourselves in shame. Samson's story has as much potency now as it ever has.

**What's the process of writing a novelization of a movie? Do you ever work with the filmmakers, or are you working on a separate project altogether?**

I can only speak from my own experiences in this collaborative process. I've worked with three different sets of filmmakers/screenwriters, and each experience has varied a bit. Overall, I take the screenplay (usually 15-20,000 words) and turn it into a full-length novel (75-80,000 words).



I am largely alone in the process, unhindered, but the screen-writers usually have the final say on whether to keep any new subplots, characters, or scenes I've added. I usually add quite a bit more than most readers realize. The trick is to be true to the heart of the original script so that even the things I've added feel organic.

It's a process that's been done for decades. Basically, it's a way to reach more people, through different forms of media.

**In addition to *Samson*, you've written a number of other novelizations based on films. How did your experience writing *Samson* compare with those projects?**

I have a lot of fun doing the novelizations. Each one has come with its own joys and obstacles. Writing the death crawl scene from *Facing the Giants* made me weep. I laughed out loud while working on *October Baby*, having fun with one of the sidekicks in the story.

With *Samson*, I had maybe the most fun I've ever had writing a book. I loved the research, the characters. And c'mon, how can you not have fun writing about one of the biggest mess-ups in the Bible? That's someone I can relate to.

**You've also written several original novels. How does the process of writing novelizations compare with your experiences writing your own stories?**

I've written nine novels, five novelizations, two novellas, and a nonfiction book. Writing my own novels is like birthing and raising my own children. It's a complete joy, but it brings deeper aggravation too. I want them to behave and live up to their potential.

Writing a novelization is a collaboration with someone else, essentially taking their child and raising it to adulthood. I come to love that child as my own. But my responsibility is to the screenwriter, recognizing that I am not the birth parent. I am there to nurture and encourage this story, helping it reach more people. I don't have to be the disciplinarian, if that makes sense. Both processes are rewarding in their own ways.

### **What do you hope readers will take away after reading this novelization of *Samson*?**

I want parents to be encouraged that God is never done with their children; He will continue working in and through them, even after you watch them stumble. I want men to be challenged to reach out to others, avoid temptation, and not let ego and pride trip them up. I want women to realize how important they are in the lives of husbands, boyfriends, brothers, and sons.

The words and choices we all make, each day, lead step by step toward or away from what God desires for us. Of course, in the process of taking all that in, I hope readers have a blast tearing through the pages of fast-paced story. **FF**

**Visit Eric Wilson's author page here:**

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## **Samson**

Novelization by Eric Wilson  
Pure Flix Books / Charisma House



*The original superhero movie based on the story of Samson and Delilah*

He has many names. Lion tamer. Fox catcher. Man killer. Each with its measure of glory and shame. But for this young Hebrew with a supernatural gift of strength, there is more to the story. Samson has a God-given destiny to defend his people from the oppressive Philistine empire. After experiencing tragedy at the hands of a cruel Philistine prince, he strives to fulfill his calling—only to fall victim to his own desires.

As Samson draws close to a Philistine temptress with a secret, this man of unbeatable strength drifts away from his destiny. Then an act of betrayal costs him everything. At his weakest Samson must rely on God in one last effort to avenge his people.

In this novelization of the major motion picture, *Samson* draws you deeper into one of the most famous biblical stories of the Old Testament. Experience the legacy of Samson and Delilah in a way you never have before.



# SUSPENSE: Terri Blackstock

## Running Toward the Light

With her fugitive series **If I Run** racing toward its finale, the author talks about why her thrillers are infused with romance—and faith.

Bestselling author **Terri Blackstock** wraps up her latest series with the thriller **If I Live** (Zondervan). Casey Cox is on the run after being indicted for murder, and investigator Dylan Roberts is now her only hope. But with the clock ticking, exposing the real killers is more complicated than they knew. Will one life have to be sacrificed to protect the other?

In this interview, Terri shares the childhood memories that sparked the series, why she chose to end the series now, and why faith is always woven into her novels.

**Terri, in your If I Run thrillers, Casey Cox is on the run because she's wanted for a murder she didn't commit. Dylan Roberts was sent to bring her to justice. What inspired you to create characters with this kind of complex relationship?**

When I was young, I used to watch *The Fugitive* TV series starring David Jansen, in which the hero has to run from the law while he tries to find his wife's real killer. In each episode, he'd be found out, and he'd leave town and start over again in a new place.

I wanted to explore a female fugitive who has to keep running and start over in new places, and try to forge a life when she knows that everywhere she lands will just be temporary. It gave me a lot of great opportunities for her to get into situa-

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tions that were fun to write about, and I hope were compelling for the reader.

Casey Cox is one of my favorite characters in any of the books I've written. She's complex and simple at the same time. She loves people and gravitates to them wherever she goes, but she's also pretty adept at staying off the grid.

She's been accused of committing a heinous murder and knows that her DNA is all over the crime scene, because she found the body. Instead of calling the police, she decides to run. She knows who really did it, but she can't go to the police because they've failed her abysmally before. She knows that if she's caught, she won't just go to prison—she'll be murdered.

Dylan Roberts is hired by the victim's family to work in conjunction with the police department to go across the country looking for Casey. He's struggling with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after surviving improvised explosive device (IED) explosions in the war, and when he begins to research Casey Cox, he realizes the two of them have more in common than he thought. He's pretty sure she has PTSD too, but he doesn't know if it caused her to snap and kill her friend, or if she just did the wrong thing because of it.

In *If I Run*, he's chasing her to bring her back for prosecution, but by the time we get to *If I'm Found*, he realizes Casey is innocent. In *If I Live*, time is running out for both of them, so—well, you have to read to find out!

**There are lots of TV series that have borrowed that model and they go on for years. How long were you planning to wait to let this play out?**

I decided to make it three books. I've gotten to the place where I kind of get bored when I get to, like, the fourth and fifth book of a series. I knew myself well enough to know that I didn't want to just drag it out.

I like to do series because my readers like it so much. But it's tough doing a series because there are so many things you have to remember that you've written in the previous books.

For instance, *If I Live*—the final book in the series—was really tough, because I had to tie up everything. I had to tie up every loose end that I had in the previous two books and bring about a satisfying ending.

Another thing is, I just didn't want to leave my readers hanging forever. They really want an end to the story. I didn't want to just drag them on for years.

**You bring up an interesting point. I've noticed that for a lot of suspense writers in the general market, it's either a lot of stand-alones or series that go on for years. In the Christian market, it does seem to be more normal for suspense series to be shorter. Why do you think that is?**

I think it has more to do with the author and what they want. Gilbert Morris and others like him have done series that go on for dozens and dozens of books, because their readers love that. Karen Kingsbury, for example, has her Baxter Family series. I don't know what book she's on, but her readers love that, and they come back for each new book.

In my case, it's about my attention span. It takes me a year to write a book—so, if I do three books, that's three years. Am I still passionate about something four years after I started? I have to consider all that.

**Sir Arthur Conan tried to kill off Sherlock Holmes because he wanted to do something different...**

Exactly! I don't want to get to the point where I'm sick of my characters. I try to plan the series in such a way that I'm still excited about writing it when I get to that last book.

**You write suspense, but your novels often include romance. What is it about that combination of suspense and romance that makes you gravitate in that direction?**

Well, I think in my mind, most romantic suspense novels center more around the romance than the suspense. In my case, it's the opposite—the suspense drives the story, and then the romance is sort of secondary. And there are some books I've written that don't have any romance at all.

I really like writing about all kinds of relationships—family relationships, husband and wife, mother and son, mother and daughter, that kind of thing. When you like writing about relationships, the most natural thing in the world is writing about romance.

In this series, the romance is developing between Dylan and Casey. In the first book, *If I Run*, he was chasing her to prosecute her. And he took it personally because he grew up with the victim and was one of his best friends. The victim's family has hired him to find Casey and work with the police. But by the second book, *If I'm Found*, he's realized that she's innocent.



He's trying to find her so he can protect her from the killers.

So, the chemistry begins to really work between them. I just love it. I think my readers love it too. They're hanging on from book to book to see what's going to happen with Dylan and Casey.

I do tend to have that in every series. I may not have in the first book, but it works toward that in the series. As much as I can, I try to get romance in there. I think that's what engages readers. Even the men.

**As you develop the characters, it carries more weight when they're in danger...**

Exactly. I like for time to be running out in a story, so there's kind of that ticking bomb and time's running out. If that person dies or if something terrible happens—like you said, it just raises the stakes when there's romance.

**How does your faith impact when you're writing about people who are in danger? There are crime elements, your stories have murders—where do you find that balance between being realistic without dwelling on it? Where do you find that line?**

The fact is that I'm a Christian reader as well. So, I really think about when I'm reading a book, what makes me feel defiled in some way? If I'm reading a really gruesome book, and there's a lot of blood, and there's a lot of violence, it makes me feel defiled. I don't want to do that to my readers, so there are lines I won't cross.

But I do have murder, and I do have blood. But I try not to make the reader wallow in it.

Probably my most gritty book was *Predator*. I deliberately did it in that book, because I wanted to scare the socks off people who were dumping all their information on social networks. I wanted them to understand that social networks are a predator's playground. And that if you were a predator, where would you go to find out where somebody was at any given time, you know, and what their habits were, what their routines were.

I just wanted to scare mostly young people, but even adults. I think that book was probably the grittiest, and that was for a purpose.

But mostly, I try not to show too much blood, not to get too gory, and to describe things in a way that it gets across what happened, but they don't have to wallow in it.

**You've mentioned in in the past how you draw from your own personal trials to create plots for your books. Tell us about that...**

I often use events from my own life, and the emotions I've experienced, in writing my books. I don't waste much in my life. When I go through something painful, there's a part of me that's always kind of standing outside myself recording how it feels to be in that situation, and later I process it by writing about it in some way.

I don't always use the exact event from my life, but I might have someone going through something similar to it, so the emotions I write in those characters are real.

**With so many books to your credit, is it difficult to create so many new characters and storylines?**

You'd think that with 80 books published, I would recycle plots and characters over and over, but that isn't the case at all. My books have to be exciting enough to hold my attention, and I get bored easily. So, I try to make each book different from all those that came before. I don't seem to have any trouble coming up with new ideas, and new ideas for plots always generate new, unique types of characters.

**You started out as an author in the general market. Why did you make the transition to writing Christian fiction?**

After I'd been writing for the romance market for 13 years, I became miserable. I loved being a writer, but I wasn't fulfilled at all. I was a Christian and had what I call a spiritual awakening, and I felt an intense conviction that I wasn't using my gift the way God had intended. I had several books under contract at that time, but I didn't want to write them.

I remember the day I got down on my knees, literally, and told God I didn't want to write anything else that didn't glorify Him. I didn't know how that would look. I knew there was a Christian fiction market, but I didn't know anything about it.

I told my publisher that I wanted to buy back my contracts, and it happened that they owed me more than I owed them, so that worked out really well. Then I was able to get an agent who sold to the Christian fiction market, and I wrote my first book proposal for a suspense novel with a Christian theme. It just so happened that Christian publishers, who had mostly published prairie fiction and historical or biblical fiction up until that point, were ready to expand their list to include more genres.

I came in at exactly the right time, and Zondervan not only bought that suspense novel, but they gave me a four-book deal. I've been writing suspense for them ever since.

**When your novels have faith and romance and suspense, which of those elements is the easiest for you to write?**

Faith is the easiest. Sometimes I have to sort of dial it back.

When I started writing Christian books, I didn't really know anything about the market. At the time, there really weren't suspense novels in the Christian market. I was coming from the romance market, and I was learning my way. But the one thing I did know is that I wanted the faith element to really have an impact on my readers.

In that that first book I wrote, I had my Christian character falling to her knees a lot and praying a lot. My editor had to show me, well, that may be what would happen in real life, but your readers may not buy that. They may not think that seems authentic. He kind of had to teach me how to restrain it a little bit and pull it back so that I'm not preachy.

Over the years, the faith element comes very naturally to me. I write about characters who don't have it all together, who maybe are suffering in some way—or I put them through the suffering—and that makes it easy for me to get the faith element in. I think people who are reading my books are suffering in a lot of ways. They're going through trials, and I want to show them that even though God doesn't necessarily erase all our trials, He certainly is there for us through them. Romans 8:28 really applies.

As long as I kind of keep that in my mind as I'm writing, the faith element just weaves its way naturally through my plots.

### **How is faith generally reflected in your stories?**

I first try to tell a great story, and my worldview naturally comes through. I think every writer has a specific worldview that works their way into their books. Mine happens to be a Christian worldview.

Faith is always a part of my plot. An example is my Cape Refuge series. That first book, *Cape Refuge*, opens with the murder of a beloved couple in town, and their daughters are determined to find the killer while they deal with their own grief.

The theme through those books is why God allows suffering. I have a character who wants to be as far removed from her parents' ministry as she can get, because she's outraged at God for letting them die that way. But over the course of four books, she comes to a better understanding of who they were and why they did what they did, and she begins to understand how God used what happened in their lives.

My Restoration series—beginning with *Last Light*—was about a massive global power outage caused by some electromagnetic pulses that knock civilization to its knees. My modern family who were addicted to technology now have to live without transportation, communication, currency, electricity, or any technology. They come to the place where they have to decide whether to hoard the food they have left, or share with others—even if it means they risk starving themselves. They choose to put their Christianity into action and help the desperate neighbors around them.

While people are looting and killing to survive, this one family tries to be light in the darkness, even while they're having to defend themselves from all the danger around them. They change in drastic ways that wouldn't have been possible without the hardship. I take that family through some tough times before it's all over.

So, the faith element is a critical aspect of the plot. It's not just plugged in. I want to write page-turners that entertain my readers, but ideally, I'd also like to challenge them and encourage them before they get to the last page. **FF**

**Visit Terri Blackstock's author page here:**

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Terri Blackstock



***If I Live***  
**If I Run Series #3**

Terri Blackstock  
Zondervan



**The hunt is almost over...**

Casey Cox is still on the run after being indicted for murder. The hunt that began with her bloody footprints escalates, and she's running out of places to hide. Her face is all over the news, and her disguises are no longer enough. It's only a matter of time before someone recognizes her.

Dylan Roberts, the investigator who once hunted her, is now her only hope. Terrifying attempts on Dylan's life could force Casey out of hiding. The clock is ticking on both their lives, but exposing the real killers is more complicated than they knew. Amassing the evidence to convict their enemies draws Dylan and Casey together, but their relationship has consequences. Will one life have to be sacrificed to protect the other?

With *If I Live*, Terri Blackstock takes us on one more heart-stopping chase in the sensational conclusion to the her If I Run series.

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# HISTORICAL: Angela Hunt

## Last Days of Paul the Apostle

Bestselling novelist **Angela Hunt** talks about the challenges and privilege of detailing the final days of the influential apostle.

To accompany the theatrical release *Paul, Apostle of Christ*, novelist **Angela Hunt** brings her expertise as a historical novelist to create a companion novelization. Two men—Paul and Luke—struggle against a determined emperor and the frailties of the human spirit to bequeath the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world.

In this interview, Angela shares the value a storyteller can bring to the historical account, the parallels she sees between ancient Rome and modern America, and what readers can learn from *Paul, Apostle of Christ*.

**Sometimes people are confused by the idea of biblical fiction. What does a novelist bring to the table that you can't get from just reading the original Scripture?**

The biblical authors were not novelists. They wrote facts, events, and dates from their perspective as they were moved by the Spirit of God. When they recounted events, however, they tended to write sparsely.

A trustworthy biblical novelist takes the Scripture and brings it to realistic life—with layers of color and texture and sensory details. We research the historical period, and read dozens of works written in that time period whenever possible, so we can get a feel for how people actually wrote, lived, and spoke.

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When we encounter conflicting expert opinions, we choose the most logical. We consider human nature, which does not change. People still get angry, frustrated, and depressed. Even biblical characters make awful mistakes, and if the Bible doesn't avoid recording them, why should a novelist?

A trustworthy author will not violate Scripture. We keep the scriptural account as our touchstone, but the parts that spring from our imagination, we freely admit are fiction.

### **Why is it important to use narrative to flesh out these historical accounts?**

God Himself recorded stories, since humans are hard-wired to appreciate story. Who would know that better than the God who created us?

Jesus used stories to teach His followers—that’s what the parables were. Through the work of the Spirit, some people caught the true meaning of Jesus’ stories, and others didn’t.

The Bible gives us all we need to know about God, but it does not give us all we want to know—we yearn to know more. Historical fiction helps us better understand the culture and history of familiar story events.

**Biblical fiction readers always want to know how much of the novel is true and how much is fiction.**

In my biblical fiction—in all my historical fiction, really—I take pains never to contradict the historical record. And since the Bible is the alpha historical record, I took great pains not to contradict anything in it.

**Your historical novels often include a bibliography at the end...**

Because it’s so easy for readers to assume that I simply made things up. I started my career as a nonfiction writer, so everything I write is based in reality. Novels may not be actual, but I believe they should deal with facts and truths. The “fictional” parts that I create have their roots in facts, logic, and probabilities.

**For *Paul, Apostle of Christ*, the filmmakers have been very open about sticking closely to the Scriptures. As you wrote the novelization, were you following the screenplay or going straight to the Bible?**

I tried to do both. Because a novel is usually more than twice as long as a screenplay, I had to add quite a bit. So when I added material, I used Scripture and logical connections. For instance,

Paul had a sister and nephew in Jerusalem—how often do we hear about them?

Luke was Greek, and would have been educated in the Greek system. Paul probably knew Stephen from his days as a student with the Sanhedrin. He would have known Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. What would their interactions have been like?

**What kind of research did you have to do to get the details right? How much did you need to look into church tradition and extrabiblical sources to fill in the gaps?**

I always do a lot of research, but I try to find sources written in the era I'm writing about—too much can be convoluted by later writers. Church tradition is replete with legends that strain my credulity, so I tend to avoid those stories unless they are plausible.

I could never rely on just one source because biblical “experts” disagree with each other all the time, especially about ancient civilizations (And most of them are quite dogmatic about their positions).

I always read several sources and then try to pretzel them together into a cohesive picture, then apply common sense and logic. The only book I leave quite alone is the Bible, but it leaves great holes that could be fleshed out in myriad ways.

**As you researched, did you discover anything about the life and times of Paul, or the culture he wrote in, that might be surprising to readers?**

Most Christians are quite familiar with Paul because he wrote so many books of the New Testament. (Luke actually wrote more

words of the New Testament, and how like a writer to consider word count.)

What I found myself doing was looking for logical connections Paul might have had with other characters. He was part of the Sanhedrin along with Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. Did they know each other? Did they interact? We know Paul was present when Stephen was killed, but did he know him before that day? Since nearly every religious Jew went to the Temple during the Pilgrimage festivals, could Paul have been present when the 12-year-old Jesus was confounding the rabbis during Passover?

The world was a smaller place in those days, so those situations might have happened. That intrigued me.

**Between Paul and Luke, the two wrote so much of the New Testament, but there's still a lot we don't really know about them. Does that make it easier or harder for you as a storyteller?**

Both. It is easier to invent situations when we don't know otherwise, but I have to make sure my fictional forays are logical and founded on fact. I couldn't have Paul trotting off to Britannia, for instance, because from what we know of his journeys, that excursion would strain a reader's credulity.

But we do know he spent three years in Arabia, so I could have written a scene where he witnessed to Nabatean Arabs. (I didn't, but I could have.)



**Compared to a script for a film, you have so much more room for a novel. How did you determine the best way to fill out the story without drifting too far away from the film's core?**

Having a screenplay to work with takes care of most of the plotting, and that's a relief. But a screenplay, when turned into prose, comes in around 30,000 words—and a novel must be around 75-80,000 words. A novelist has to add a lot, but the added material mustn't detract from or contradict the screenplay. That can be a challenge.

When I'm doing a novelization, I have to begin where and when the movie begins and end where and when the movie ends. My novelization will contain everything in the movie, as well as material that expands the movie's characters and plot.

**What are some strengths that a novel has when compared to a film? Is there anything that the film can convey more easily than a novel?**

In a film, the viewer only knows what he can see and hear. In a novel, the writer can help a reader “hear” a character’s thoughts and experience what a character tastes, smells, intuitions, and feels beneath his fingertips.

Conversely, a filmmaker can show the image of a building or a landscape and convey in a second what might take a writer a thousand words to express.

**Angela, you’ve written several historical novels that expand on real people and real events. What are the challenges of expanding on these accounts while also staying true to what actually happened?**

I have a personal guideline—I never want to contradict historical fact. Trouble is, sometimes historical accounts don’t agree, and then I have to read all the accounts and choose the most plausible.

As a novelist, I feel free to amplify those historical accounts as long as I don’t contradict actual events or known personalities. History—and the Bible as history—is like a pencil sketch. It gives us a picture of events, but it’s not detailed. What historical fiction does is fill in the sketch with color and texture and sound and taste and motivation.

It’s the difference between a nearly blank canvas and a detailed painting—and yes, sometimes a little artistic license comes into play. But the Truth is still present.

**What's your favorite thing about writing a biblical novel that fleshes out a person or events from the Bible?**

I love learning new things. By the time I finish a historical novel—any novel, actually—I feel as if I have lived my protagonist's experiences.

That's why I have recently written three novels set in the Intertestamental Period—because I knew very little about that era. But oh, what an exciting and eventful time it was!

**What parallels do you see between the ancient Romans and contemporary American society?**

The more secular the United States becomes, the more like the Romans we become. The chief difference between our two systems is that America was founded by Christian people who sought religious freedom. The Romans celebrated religious freedom, too, but they were pagans, with a god for everything.

Our system of morality is based upon Judeo-Christian principles, but the Romans had no such foundation. The more we abandon our foundational principles, the more like the Romans we become.

**What theme or idea do you hope readers come away with after reading *Paul, Apostle of Christ*?**

The realization that struck me most as I worked on the book was this: Paul and Luke and Priscilla and Aquila lived in a time when they could be arrested, tortured, and burned on a cross simply for being known as a Christian.

I grew up in a time when most of the United States claimed to be Christian, but that time has passed. Today believers in Christ are routinely insulted, vilified, or mocked simply for saying



Angela Hunt

something about Jesus on Facebook—and sometimes we remain silent when we should speak out.

But Paul and Luke and the others were fearless because they lived for Christ and His kingdom, not for this world. Their treasures weren't on earth. Their hearts weren't fixed on earthly relationships. Their obedience was to Christ and no one else.

Their example was humbling—and challenging. That is the lesson I hope people take away from this film and this book. If we truly believe, we need to adjust our focus and look to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our lives. **FF**

**Visit Angela Hunt's author page here:**

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## ***Paul, Apostle of Christ***

The Novelization of the  
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Angela Hunt

Bethany House


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Paul, Apostle of Christ is the story of two men. Luke, as a friend and physician, risks his life every time he ventures into the city of Rome to visit Paul, who is held captive in Nero's bleakest prison cell. Before Paul's execution, Luke resolves to write another book, one that details the beginnings of "the Way" and the birth of what will come to be known as the church. But Nero is determined to rid Rome of Christians.

Paul has survived so much—floggings, shipwreck, starvation, stoning, hunger and thirst, cold and exposure—yet as he waits for his appointment with death, he is haunted by the shadows of his past. He wonders if he has been forgotten—and if he has the strength to finish well.

Two men struggle against a determined emperor and the frailties of the human spirit in order to bequeath the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world.

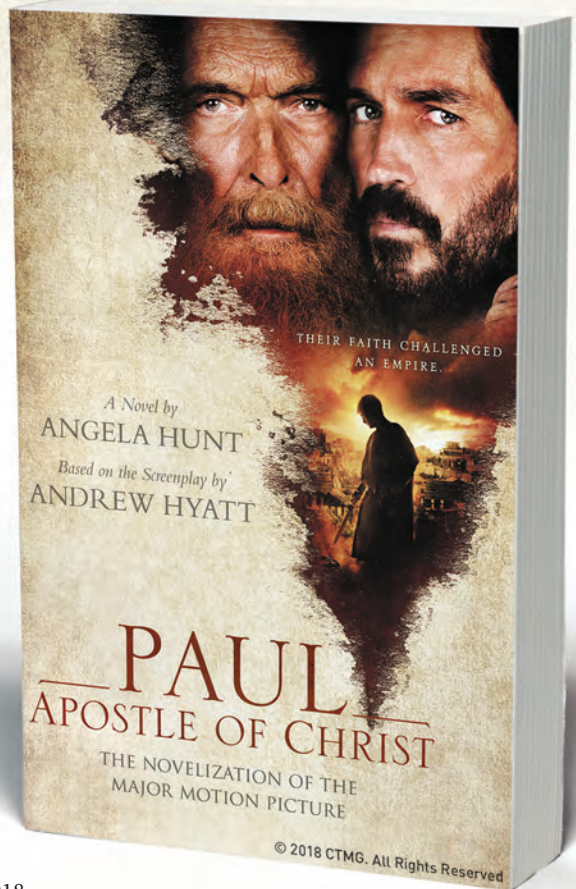


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Struggling against the frailties of the human spirit and an emperor determined to rid the world of Christians, these two men will race against time and history to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world.



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The latest Amish novel from author **Vannetta Chapman** is ***Who the Bishop Knows*** (Harvest House), the third in her Amish Bishop Mysteries. With a murderer on the loose and members of his community being threatened, can Amish bishop Henry Lapp solve a crime he didn't witness?



In this interview, Vannetta talks about the challenges of creating suspense in an Amish setting, the inspiration behind the mystery series, and what makes Bishop Lapp so special.

**An Amish mystery series is such an intriguing idea. What are the challenges of creating a suspenseful plot and incorporating that into an Amish setting?**

Definitely it is a challenge to balance the gentle, pastoral Amish setting that we all think of when we think of Amish with the gritty scene of a murder investigation. I think the key is to allow for problems that the rest of the world faces, but to emphasize that the Amish response to those problems is a bit different—gentler, calmer, more forgiving. Of course, in this instance, there's still a killer to be caught.

What was the inspiration behind the Amish Bishop Mysteries? As with many of my novels, it all began with a small news story. This one was about accidental savants—the skills they have and the challenges they face. Rather than being born with savant abilities, these people suffered some sort of injury—usually a traumatic brain injury—that resulted in their having unusual abilities.



I spoke to an Amish gentleman a few years ago who was a wonderful baseball pitcher and was scouted by a pro baseball team. Those two things came together in my mind and the character of Bishop Henry Lapp was born. Henry's special ability is that he is able to draw anything that he sees.

He doesn't possess a photographic memory—which scientists say is an impossibility—but his hand can draw anything that his subconscious remembers. And his subconscious remembers everything. For Henry, this is both a blessing and a curse.

### **What kind of research did you do for this series?**

In addition to learning about savants, I visited the small Amish community in Monte Vista, Colorado, where the book takes place. It's a very different setting from what you might find in Pennsylvania or Ohio or Indiana. And the natural beauty of the area—from the migration of the cranes to the Great Sand Dunes National Park to Colorado's oldest rodeo—provided a fun backdrop to tell my story against.

But the Amish life is much the same in spite of the fact that these Colorado Amish live in a high desert valley and use solar energy. There's still the focus on faith and community and hard work.

### **Would you tell us a little more about Bishop Lapp and what makes him special?**

Readers' response to Henry has really touched my heart. I think we all are drawn to a grandfather-type character. Henry isn't perfect by any means—the fact that he was “chosen” to be a bishop at first puzzled him as much as anyone, especially given his savant abilities which many people are uncomfortable with.

However, Henry's real gift is his compassion for people. He's more than just a bishop or a sleuth—he's a dear friend to folks within his Amish community, and he cares about the *Englisch* community as well. I guess Henry is everything that I remember and love about my own grandfather—kind, gentle, fun, wise, and a little mischievous.

### **Without revealing too much, can you tell us about what Henry faces in *Who the Bishop Knows*?**

In the first two books of this series—*What the Bishop Saw*, and *When the Bishop Needs an Alibi*—Henry learns to embrace his unusual gift. He finally accepts that God has a reason for making him exactly how he is, and that God will use this strange gift for good things.

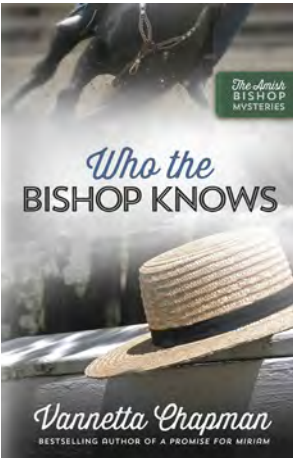
But in *Who the Bishop Knows*, Henry doesn't see anything. He doesn't witness the murder, he's observed no clues, he wasn't even present when the murder occurred.

## Vannetta Chapman

Instead of relying on his abilities, Henry turns to what might be an even more important gift—his ability to understand people. If he can focus on who he knows, not what he knows, he might be able to save those in his community from danger. Henry has to trust that God is still in control of the situation around them, and that even from evil, He can bring good. **FF**

**Visit Vannetta Chapman's author page here:**

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### ***Who the Bishop Knows*** Amish Bishop Mysteries #3 Vannetta Chapman

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Lindsay Harrel's novel *The Heart Between Us* (Thomas Nelson) is the story of two sisters, one heart transplant, and a bucket List. After a lifetime of illness, Megan must learn to embrace the heart she's been given so that she can finally share it with the people she loves most.



In this interview, Lindsay tells *FamilyFiction* the most challenging part of writing the novel, the real-life incident that inspired the story, and how the novel can inspire readers to live a life of bravery.

## **What inspired you to write *The Heart Between Us*? And are the characters completely made up, or are they based on real people?**

The first spark of an idea for *The Heart Between Us* came from a radio story I heard about someone going skydiving because it was on her heart donor's bucket list. As for the characters, I don't intentionally base them on real people, but I often realize they share certain characteristics with someone I know after I finish writing the book.

For example, I relate a lot to the way Crystal—Megan's twin sister—bases her identity on achievement, as well as how growing up with an ill family member affected her sense of that identity. Also, the way Megan faced adversity with continued positivity reminds me of my mother, who died of cancer when I was 19.





## **Can you tell us a little about Megan and what she's facing in this story?**

Sure! Three-and-a-half years ago, Megan had a heart transplant after dealing with a lifetime of illness and facing possible death daily. Now, she's 32 years old, living in her parents' home, working the same job as she did in high school, letting the dreams she had of being a travel writer slip by—essentially, she's stuck.

When her heart donor's parents ask to meet and share with her their teenage daughter's journal, Megan is inspired to fulfill the girl's bucket list as a way of honoring Amanda and taking a step toward her own freedom. Of course, nothing is as simple as it should be. Especially when her estranged twin sister, Crystal, decides to tag along for reasons of her own ... and when her best friend from the past, Caleb, comes back into her life, challenging her to be brave—and fall in love.

**What was the most challenging part of writing this novel?**

The fact I had to research all these amazing locations around the world and couldn't convince my tax lawyer husband to let me write off a research trip. Joking, joking—kind of.

In all seriousness, aside from finding the time to write it—I have a toddler and a baby—it was most challenging to dig deep enough within my own emotions and leave my vulnerability on the page.

**What do you hope readers will take away after reading it?**

Fear and bravery are central themes in *The Heart Between Us*. Megan is afraid to follow her dreams. Crystal is afraid of facing her past and losing control of her future. I hope every person who encounters *The Heart Between Us* will be inspired to live a life of bravery—and that starts with finding true freedom in Christ.

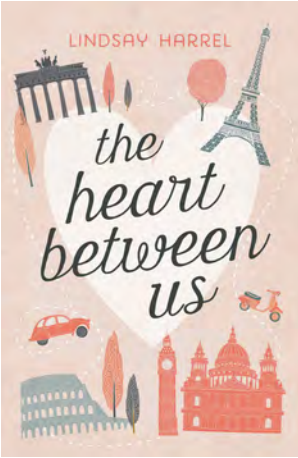
**Since a bucket list is a significant part of this story, can you share a couple of things from your own bucket list?**

Of course! I have visited the British Isles and Paris, but I very much want to visit Italy next—Rome, Venice, and Florence especially. I also want to spend time at various B&Bs in the English countryside. How peaceful would that be? I can just picture myself writing and reading in such a gorgeous setting. **FF**

**Visit Lindsay Harrel's author page here:**

<https://www.familyfiction.com/authors/lindsay-harrel>

Lindsay Harrel



***The Heart Between Us***

Lindsay Harrel  
Thomas Nelson



Historical author **Sarah Sundin** kicks off her Sunrise at Normandy series with ***The Sea Before Us*** (Revell). In this World War II romance, an American naval officer must work closely with a member of the Women's Royal Naval Service. As they grow closer, he fears his efforts to win the war will destroy everything she has ever loved.



In this interview, Sarah tells ***FamilyFiction*** more about the series, what got her interested in writing fiction set during WWII, and learning to trust that God is in control.

### **Sarah, would you please tell us about *The Sea Before Us*?**

In the Sunrise at Normandy series, the three estranged Paxton brothers fight on D-Day—from the sea, in the air, and on the ground. *The Sea Before Us* is naval officer Lt. Wyatt Paxton's story.

In 1944, Wyatt arrives in London to prepare for the Allied invasion of France, determined to redeem himself with the brothers he has betrayed. Dorothy Fairfax serves as a "Wren" in the Women's Royal Naval Service, striving for the love of her bereaved father and of the man she's always adored.

Wyatt and Dorothy work together on plans for D-Day. But will family secrets, misplaced affections—and the seas off Normandy—separate them forever?

### **How did you become interested in the World War II period?**

Family stories piqued my interest from a young age. My grandfather was a pharmacist's mate—medic—in the Navy, my great-



uncle was a B-17 pilot, and my grandmothers held down the home front.

They were all storytellers, so I was blessed. The difficulties of the war helped shape them into strong and resilient people—people I long to be like.

### **What type of research was required for writing about D-Day and the invasion of Normandy?**

Plenty! To learn about the naval action off Omaha Beach, I read the action reports and war diaries of the American destroyers that served in that sector on D-Day. For Dorothy's story, I read about the Wrens, including oral histories of some of the British ladies who served in the Royal Navy.

On the lighter side, I learned how to make a proper English pot of tea, found a recipe for Lord Woolton Pie, and discovered that colored pencils had been invented before World War II but weren't manufactured in Britain during the war.

## **Are there any lessons that you hope readers can learn from *The Sea Before Us*?**

In the story, Wyatt tells Dorothy, “When times are dark, it’s hard to see the light, but it doesn’t mean the light is less real.” Both are dealing with very dark times—war, air raids, shortages, and family crises—but Wyatt concentrates on the light and leans on God.

I hope readers will learn along with Dorothy that God’s light is present at all times. As Psalm 139:9–10 says, *If I ... dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there ... thy right hand shall hold me.*

## **Both Wyatt and Dorothy long to protect those they love, but find it isn’t always possible or even good. When does this urge to protect become a problem?**

I’m always amazed how God draws parallels between my life and my novels. While writing this story, I was adjusting to the empty nest as our youngest son joined the Navy and was deployed overseas. As a mom, I want to protect my children and hold them tight in my hands.

In *The Sea Before Us*, Dorothy longs to protect her grieving father and Wyatt wants to protect his family and Dorothy too. But they each come to see that control is an illusion—their loved ones are in the Lord’s hands, not theirs. While we must provide reasonable protections for those we love, we also need to trust them in God’s hands, remembering He loves them even more than we do. **FF**

**Visit Sarah Sundin’s author page here:**

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Sarah Sundin



## ***The Sea Before Us***

Sunrise at Normandy #1

Sarah Sundin

Revell



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**Shannon Taylor Vannatter** continues her Texas Cowboys romance series with ***Counting on the Cowboy*** (Love Inspired). With Devree's business back in the city, can a Texas cowboy convince her she's found her home—with him?



In this interview, Shannon tells us about her protagonists, the real-life person who inspired the story, and the pros and cons of being a minister's wife who writes romance fiction.

### **What was the inspiration driving the story in *Counting on the Cowboy*?**

A single girl in our church had to move out of her apartment quickly. The only place she could find was in the country and had been uninhabited for several years. Every time she came to church, she had a story. About mouse traps going off all night, and being in a quandary when one got its tail caught. A skunk crawling in her heater vent, spraying, and dying. Cows surrounding her car and licking the windshield—so that once she finally got them to move, she couldn't see out. I told her someday all of it was going in a book.

### **What can you tell us about your protagonists?**

Devree Malone was raised in the country, hated it, and moved to the city. Her sister's high-risk pregnancy lands her at a dude ranch in the boondocks. A sought-after wedding planner, she's sick of weddings after getting her heart broken and wants to get into event planning. She shows up at the ranch to keep an eye





on her sister and do one final wedding in hopes of impressing a potential even client but ends up decorating guest cabins while she's there.

Brock McBride is all country, grew up on the ranch, builds luxury cabins, and is happy to help his friend out with finishing touches on newly built cabins. Soon he's avoiding two people—the city girl because one broke his heart a few years back, and the housekeeper who turns out to be someone from his past.

**You told us about the friend who inspired your story. How often are your characters based on people you know, or are they usually made up?**

Though I used our church friend's adventures, the heroine isn't based on her. I wanted to dedicate the book to her for inspiring me, but the housekeeper who has a bad past has a similar name. I named the housekeeper three books ago, so I couldn't change it and I didn't want my friend to be confused with the character, since they're nothing alike.

Sometimes, I base an aspect of a character on someone I know or even on myself and facets of my husband's character go into each hero.

### **What do you want readers to take away after reading *Counting on the Cowboy*?**

Even though I write romance, I want all my books to show that love doesn't conquer all, Jesus does. Devree and Brock have to turn some things over to God and trust Him with their happily ever after.

### **What are the pros and cons of writing "romances" as the wife of a pastor?**

Pros: Our church family is very supportive. I have several members ready and waiting for my next book. I get a lot of peace from writing, since as the pastor's wife, people tend to come to me with their problems. My husband and I have often given prayerful, sound, biblical advice that hasn't been heeded.

With books, I can make people do what they should and need to do. I can fix their lives for them and it's very healing.

Cons: I'm always clarifying that I write Christian romance and worry that people will think I write books that aren't nice. Since I've said I base my heroes on my husband, he thinks people who read them expect him to live up to my characters. He does—above and beyond—but he doesn't think so.

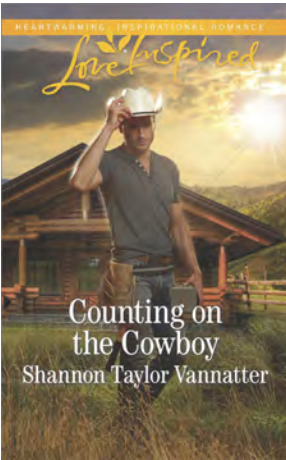
My first three books were set in Arkansas in a real town close to where we live. After that, I had an idea for a book based around the rodeo since my dad was once an announcer and I worked the concession stand. It turned into a series of eight and then morphed into cowboys on ranches.

Shannon Taylor Vannatter

I worry that readers expect me to be a cowgirl with a cowboy husband. We're totally not. We don't even have any farm animals. But he is from Texas. **FF**

**Visit Shannon Taylor Vannatter's author page here:**

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### ***Counting on the Cowboy***

Texas Cowboys #4

Shannon Taylor Vannatter

Love Inspired

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Science fiction writer **Joshua A. Johnston** continues his Chronicles of Sarco series with ***Into the Void*** (Enclave Publishing). As humanity and its allies are rebuilding, Navy officer Jared Carter tracks the planet-ship Malum back across the Great Void to determine what threat its makers still pose. But dangers loom in the unknown regions ahead—and even aboard his own ship.



In this interview, Joshua tells ***FamilyFiction*** about the universe he created, the challenges of writing science fiction from a biblical worldview, and what he hopes readers find in the series

## **Would you tell us about the world you created for the Chronicles of Sarco series?**

The Chronicles of Sarco novels are set in a future of space travel, alien races, galactic politics, and all the uncertainties and dangers that come with those things. If you've watched or read the likes of *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, or other galactic space adventures, you'll be in familiar territory.

In my novels, humans have emerged from a Dark Age where most of Earth's history—as in, the time we're living in now—has been lost. But when humanity stumbles upon alien wreckage that crashed onto Earth, they're able to use the technology to develop interstellar travel, where they find out they're not alone. Eventually, humans join a number of alien races to carve out the Confederacy, a loose alliance of spacefaring races dedicated to promoting interstellar trade and goodwill.



**Jared Carter has been through a lot in *Edge of Oblivion*, having fought to protect his world from an alien attack. Without giving away too much, can you tell us about some of the challenges he faces in *Into the Void*?**

In *Edge of Oblivion*, Jared and his crew were given a long-shot assignment that they hoped might help them find a way to stop Malum, a moon-sized attacker from outside the Confederacy. In *Into the Void*, Jared is given a new assignment: to track Malum's path back into the unknown regions and learn what he can about the planet-ship's makers.

The challenges Jared faces are much different than in *Edge of Oblivion*. In the first book, Jared crisscrossed the Confederacy in a small interceptor with a crew he knew well.

In the second book, Jared has to lead a large Navy cruiser with a large crew, including many officers Jared does not know. So not only does Jared have to contend with the challenges of explor-

ing a completely unexplored part of space, but he has to do it with a ship and crew largely unfamiliar to him. That means that he'll have to cope with everything that comes with strange new worlds far away from home, but also with problems that arise under his command, including something more malevolent than he could ever imagine.

### **When did you start writing SciFi and why do you love it?**

I grew up around science fiction. As a kid, I was exposed to a lot of sci-fi on TV and in film: *Star Trek*, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Doctor Who*, and, of course, *Star Wars*.

When I got a little older, my mom started taking me to the public library, and I discovered the infinite world of science fiction literature. I became a big fan of Robert Heinlein, including his novels *Starship Troopers* and *Tunnel in the Sky*. I also ate up Isaac Asimov's Foundation series.

I read other genres, too, but SF has always been a personal favorite in the way it inspired a sense of wonder at the future possibilities of humanity. The notion that we might one day get up into that big sky of ours, or that we might set foot on other planets, has always captivated me.

As for my own writing—well, I'd written some science fiction as a hobby when I was a kid, but my first attempt at it in adulthood happened quite by accident.

Not long after graduating from college, I had a mishap with a new computer that, for a time, took away one of my very few sources of entertainment. In search of something to do, I dragged out an ancient computer and started sketching out a science fiction novel on a word processor.

From that time came a draft of a novel trilogy that sat fallow for several years. When I revisited them later, I realized they were largely terrible. But I also saw seeds of promise in them. I went back to the drawing board, rewriting them, and the Sarco trilogy was the result.

### **How does your faith come through in these stories? Is it a challenge to incorporate a biblical worldview into science fiction?**

There are some different schools of thought on how to incorporate faith into speculative fiction. Some authors are very explicit, bringing, say, Christianity into play in a very concrete way. Other authors are more subtle about faith, such as those who use it in a more salient or allegorical way.

Now, I personally don't necessarily think there's a "right" way to do it. There's an old SciFi novel from decades ago, *Escape from the Twisted Planet*, written by *Christianity Today* CEO Harold Myra, that is a good example of a more explicit approach. You could also point to Ted Dekker or many of Frank Peretti's novels.

On the other hand, I think you can be successful being more salient or allegorical. C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* is probably the best example of this approach. Lewis never mentions Jesus in his book, but there's never any question who Aslan is.

I spent a long time weighing which approach was best for me. I ultimately felt like the Lewis approach was closer to what I wanted my novels to be. That means that you won't see Jesus's name used in the book, but you also won't have to look far to see how my faith imprints into the plotline.

## **What do you hope readers will take away from the Chronicles of Sarco series?**

I hope readers have as much fun reading the books as I did writing them. I hope that Christian readers enjoy following the faith elements in the series, but I also hope those who don't share my faith still find points of contact the way they do with other novels written by other Christians.

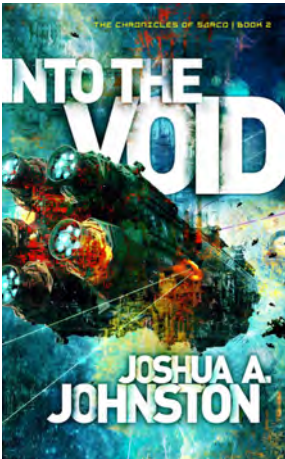
I also hope that readers can feel like the novels take them somewhere truly epic. That they come away feeling the same sense of wonder that I felt the first time I watched the U.S.S. Enterprise embark on its first five-year mission. **FF**

**Visit Joshua A. Johnston's author page here:**

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Joshua A. Johnston



***Into the Void***

Chronicles of Sarco #2

Joshua A. Johnston

Enclave Publishing



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**DiAnn Mills** is a bestselling author who believes her readers should expect an adventure. Her latest thriller is ***High Treason*** (Tyndale House), the latest in her FBI Task Force series.

When a Saudi prince visits Houston, an attempt on his life puts all agencies on high alert. FBI Special Agent Kord Davidson and CIA operative Monica Alden must put aside interagency squabbles when they learn the prince has additional motives for his visit.



In this interview, DiAnn shares the inspiration behind the novel, what kind of research she did for the FBI Task Force series, and the most challenging part of writing the book.

### **Tell us about the plot of *High Treason* and the inspiration behind the story...**

The idea originated with an FBI friend who told me about a case in New York City where the FBI uncovered an assassination attempt on a Saudi Arabian ambassador. I thought about the story possibility for a long time—setting it in Houston, making the plot unique, showing cultural differences—until I had to write it. An FBI agent and a CIA operative are assigned to the case, and the CIA operative is a woman—caught up in an environment in which women are not viewed the same as men.

### **Share a little about your research process. What kind of research did you do for the FBI Task Force series?**

For all my stories, Houston's FBI has been amazing to answer questions, provide insight, and offer ways to dig deeper into my



characters and plot. The research is always enjoyable because I'm able to learn something new.

Diving into Saudi Arabian culture challenged me more than I thought possible. I was fortunate to have several interviews with a female missionary who'd worked with Middle Eastern women. However, while she enriched my knowledge and warmed my heart to the women, she didn't have firsthand experience with Saudi Arabian women. Through online recommendations, extensive reading, interviews, and rechecking facts, I formed my Saudi Arabian story world. The culture proved interesting and fascinating.

I studied food, dress, gender distinctions, business, personalities, and even politics, and *High Treason* took a few twists and turns that I didn't see coming! On a personal note, I find it much easier to communicate with Muslim women and look forward to future friendships.

**Which part is more interesting for you to think about and write—who your characters are, or the things they do? Why?**

Both. Each character is a distinct individual who has experienced life according to his or her personality, family, education, career, setting, friendships, interests, age, viewpoint, and the list goes on. For me, it's impossible to view character and plot separate. What each character does is reflected by who he or she is.

**Why do you enjoy writing romantic suspense?**

We live in a dangerous and unpredictable world, one that's also filled with the love of God. The mix of suspense and the gift of love appeals to my sense of adventure and romance. The world needs the combination, to know others are trained to prevent and protect people, and those brave persons crave love and relationships too.

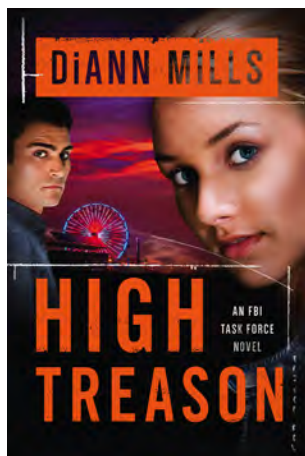
**What was the most challenging part of writing this book?**

Showing respect among my characters. My goal is for any reader, regardless of religion or beliefs, to be entertained and immersed into *High Treason* without being offended. As a Christian, I find many people so afraid of other faiths that they fail to love the person. We all have differences, and we'll never all agree, but we can show love and respect. **FF**

**Visit DiAnn Mills' author page here:**

<https://www.familyfiction.com/authors/diann-mills>

DiAnn Mills



## ***High Treason***

FBI Task Force #3

DiAnn Mills

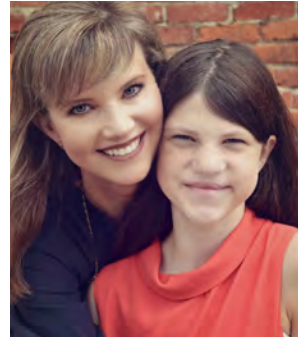
Tyndale House



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FAMILYFICTION.COM

Author **Missy Robertson**, one of the stars of the reality show *Duck Dynasty*, has teamed with daughter **Mia** to write a series of children's books. The Faithgirlz series ***Princess in Camo*** follows the adventures and challenges faced by 12-year-old Allie Carroway and her cousins. The second book is ***Allie's Bayou Rescue*** (Zonderkidz).



In this interview, Missy and Mia discuss the real-life inspirations behind the stories, the fun (and hard) parts of writing together, and the role that faith plays in every story.

**Missy, share how the *Princess in Camo* series came about. Are the characters inspired by members of your family, or are they all made up?**

**Missy:** Actually, all the characters are inspired by members of our family. Allie and her cousins are heavily inspired by Mia and the cousins closest to her in age. Mia and her cousins have been very close their entire lives. They've experienced almost everything together, even including filming a reality show. The emotions and struggles depicted by them in these books come from their own experiences.

Learning how to incorporate a new member of the family is hard enough, but having that new member be a middle school boy? That seems impossible on its face. But they have all embraced Rowdy and tried to include him in their lives. This is portrayed in *Allie's Bayou Rescue*.



In *Running from Reality*, the demands of filming every day while trying to keep a normal life with normal friends and activities also poses a challenge to this group of cousins—as well as the adult family members. We all wanted to run at least once or twice during the five-year long series.

The kids, however, were allowed to experience a break from filming, but with restrictions. It was the perfect scenario for them to understand the responsibility that comes with the blessings God gives us.

### **Where do you get your inspiration for the storylines?**

**Missy:** From our real lives. The tree house depicted in the first book is right across the street from our front window. The challenges of filming for *Duck Dynasty* was the inspiration behind the second book. The cousins' love for their dogs—and there are a lot of them—was the inspiration behind book number three, and our family's love and commitment to Camp Ch-Yo-Ca was the inspiration behind the last book.

### **What can you tell about the story of *Allie's Bayou Rescue* and your main character, Allie?**

**Missy:** Allie struggles with allergies and learns that certain things trigger her body to react to them in a way that threatens her

health and her life. Her parents know they need to do something drastic to help her, so they plan to move out of their mold-infested house. No one likes change, and Allie is no different. She does not want to move away from her cousins. She's also forced to make a decision about letting a new family member into her all-girl cousin club—a boy, no less. This book helps us realize how much God loves each of us and wants the best for us. It also teaches us the importance of becoming part of His forever family.

**Mia—is Allie like you at all? If so, in what ways?**

**Mia:** Allie isn't shy, and she tells it like it is. I would say that is definitely like me. She is also a risk-taker, just like me. And she really loves her family, just like me.

**What was it like to collaborate on the series as mother and daughter? Was it fun, challenging, or both?**

**Missy:** Both. Hearing all the kids excitedly tell their stories, picking their character names and personalities, and incorporating their funny quirks was all a fun part of this collaboration. The challenge was combining the fun with the serious lessons to be learned.

We want this not only to be fun and interesting to read—which they so are—but we also want the reader to feel like she has a purpose in this life and that she is worth it. God made each of us a valuable part of His plan.

**How does faith play a part in the Princess in Camo series?**

**Missy:** Faith is the biggest inspiration behind the entire series. God blessed our family with many things. But the biggest thing is the blessing of family. It helps us all understand that we are a part of God's family. He takes us in, forgives us, challenges us, and loves us no matter what.



## What are some of the main themes or life lessons in *Allie's Bayou Rescue*?

**Missy:** Two things: trusting in God to take care of us through the crucial times in life, including a health crisis. We may not get what we ask for, but we have to trust that He knows what's best for us.

The second is accepting new people into our lives. We may not agree with, understand, or even like everyone's personalities. But we should love and accept them and have mercy on them, just like God does with us.

## What do you hope your readers will take away when they read *Allie's Bayou Rescue* and the other books in the series?

**Missy:** We hope they laugh hard, smile a lot, get scared, and maybe even let a tear or two drop. Emotions can lead our hearts to search for the truth in certain situations. We hope these readers search for the Truth of Jesus. He loves us all so much. He wants the best for us. He also wants us to give our best to each other. **FF**

**Visit Missy and Mia Robertson's author page here:**

<https://www.familyfiction.com/authors/missy-and-mia-robertson>



### ***Allie's Bayou Rescue***

Princess in Camo #2

Missy and Mia Robertson, with Jill Osborne  
Zonderkidz



Writer **Cara J. Stevens** and illustrator **Amanda Brack** team up for the exciting comic-book style collection ***Superheroes of the Bible: Action and Adventure Stories about Real-Life Heroes*** (Good Books). Kids will love these action-packed adventures featuring great heroes of the Bible.



In this interview, Cara explains why these historical accounts still resonate centuries later, the challenges of collaborating for this book, and how working on a Bible collection compares to her work with licensed characters like *Sesame Street* and *SpongeBob SquarePants*.

## **What inspired retelling these familiar Bible accounts in this format?**

I write a lot about adventurers and superheroes for kids. It's my favorite type of writing, because I love inspiring young readers to dream big, achieve more, and reach for the stars. When my publisher suggested writing about superheroes of the Bible, I was inspired and excited. Here was a whole world of stories where people had faith and did the right thing and achieved more than anyone believed was possible!

## **Cara, what is it about these people in the Bible that still resonates with modern readers all these centuries later?**

Almost every superhero story is a tale of good versus evil and often features an underdog beating the odds through making good and difficult choices. The more I looked at the stories from the Old and New Testament, the more it became clear that these are the true original superhero tales.



### **What were the challenges of collaborating to create this book?**

When I set out to write down the stories, it was hard to choose ones that were age-appropriate and inspiring. In some areas, we had too much to choose from. I also wanted to be sure to include more female heroines, and women weren't always given starring roles in the Bible tales.

I started my research with the Old Testament, which are the stories I grew up with. The New Testament stories were all mostly new to me. I ended up spending a lot more time researching both, because I enjoyed discovering all the stories and reimagining them as superhero tales that both entertained and guided young readers.

### **What do you hope that readers come away with after reading *Superheroes of the Bible*?**

I hope kids and their parents find enjoyment and inspiration in these stories and carry the stories with them through their lives.

**You've worked with a lot of popular children's characters before, including characters from *Sesame Street* and *Spongebob Squarepants*. With these retellings from the Bible, how do you balance between showing them as relevant to children without making them just another set of "characters"?**

When you learn traditional stories as a young child, you internalize them and eventually they become part of you, guiding you when you need inspiration and consoling you when you need comfort. Bible stories are different from licensed character stories, which are often based on archetypes found in the Bible but do not guide readers with life lessons or rules for behavior.

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

If you like a book by a certain author, search online to see what else they have written. Goodreads and Amazon are great places to learn about your favorite authors. Many authors also have a personal website that gives more information about their books and helps you contact them directly.

I love hearing from readers. I get messages every week on my Facebook author page from parents and kids telling me what they like about the books they've read and asking me when my next books are coming out. I really like it when kids ask me questions about being a writer or about the different topics I write about.

Cara J. Stevens

One parent even asked if I could call his daughter for an interview project she was doing for school. We chatted on the phone and talked about writing, playing video games, playing soccer, our families, and where we lived. It was a lot of fun. **FF**

**Visit Cara J. Stevens' author page here:**

<https://www.familyfiction.com/authors/cara-j-stevens>

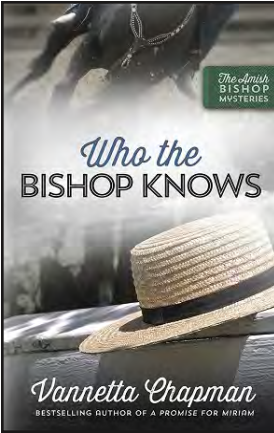


***Superheroes of the Bible:  
Action and Adventure Stories  
about Real-Life Heroes***

Cara J. Stevens and Amanda Brack  
Good Books



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**WHO THE BISHOP KNOWS**

THE AMISH BISHOP MYSTERIES #3

**Vannetta Chapman**

Harvest House

**Genres:** Amish, Romance, Suspense



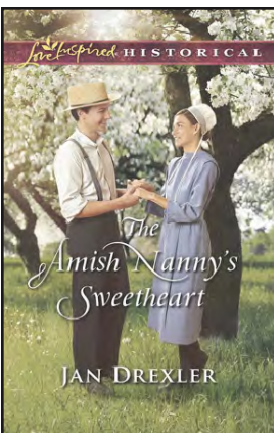
**HIS RISK**

AMISH OF HART COUNTY #4

**Shelley Shepard Gray**

Avon Inspire

**Genres:** Amish, Romance, Suspense



**THE AMISH NANNY'S SWEETHEART**

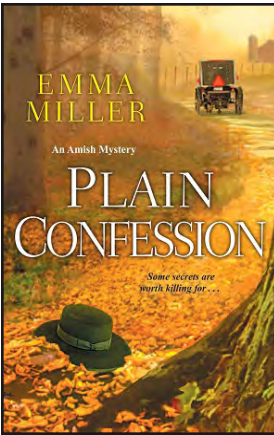
AMISH COUNTRY BRIDES #2

**Jan Drexler**

Love Inspired Historical

**Genres:** Amish, Romance, Historical





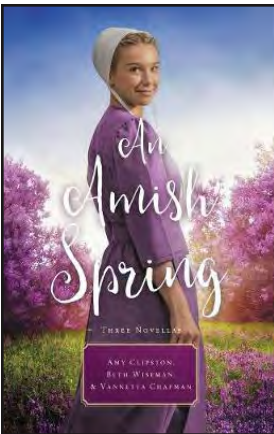
**PLAIN CONFESSION**

AN AMISH MYSTERY #5

**Emma Miller**

Kensington

**Genres:** Amish, Suspense, Romance



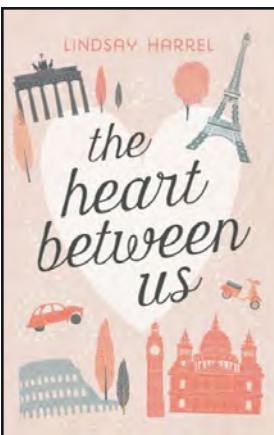
**AN AMISH SPRING**

**Amy Clipston, Beth Wiseman,**

**Vannetta Chapman**

Zondervan

**Genres:** Amish, Romance



**THE HEART BETWEEN US**

**Lindsay Harrel**

Thomas Nelson

**Genre:** Contemporary





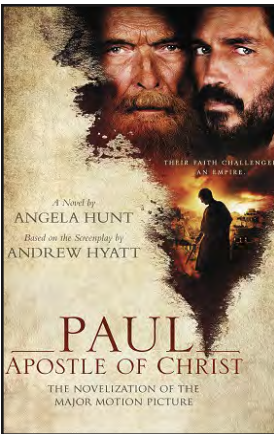
***HIGH COTTON***

BUCKLIN FAMILY REUNION #1

***Debby Mayne***

Gilead Publishing

**Genres:** Contemporary, Romance



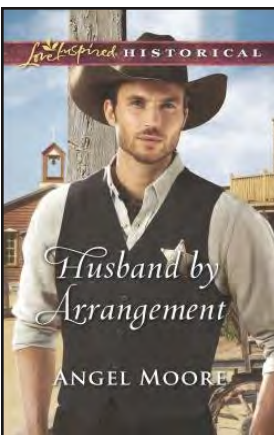
***PAUL, APOSTLE OF CHRIST***

***THE NOVELIZATION OF THE MAJOR  
MOTION PICTURE***

***Angela Hunt***

Bethany House

**Genre:** Historical



***HUSBAND BY ARRANGEMENT***

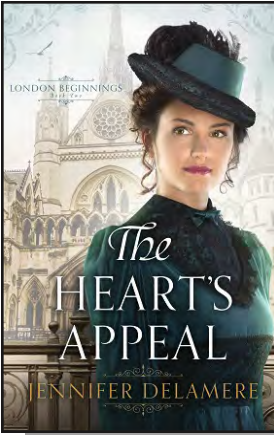
***Angel Moore***

Love Inspired Historical

**Genres:** Historical, Romance







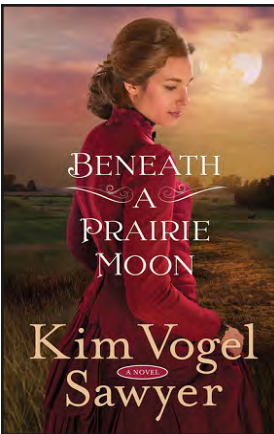
***THE HEART'S APPEAL***

LONDON BEGINNINGS #2

***Jennifer Delamere***

Bethany House

**Genres:** Historical, Romance



***BENEATH A PRAIRIE MOON***

***Kim Vogel Sawyer***

WaterBrook

**Genres:** Historical, Romance



***A BORROWED DREAM***

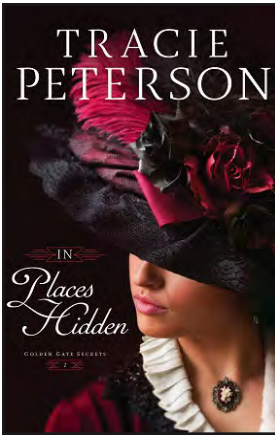
CIMARRON CREEK #2

***Amanda Cabot***

Revell

**Genres:** Historical, Romance





**IN PLACES HIDDEN**

GOLDEN GATE SECRETS #1

**Tracie Peterson**

Bethany House

**Genres:** Historical, Romance, Suspense



**THE MASTERPIECE**

**Francine Rivers**

Tyndale House

**Genres:** Romance, Contemporary



**JADE'S MATCH**

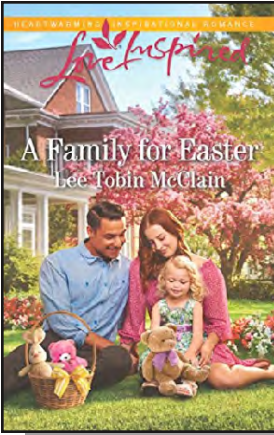
THE JEWEL #7

**Hallee Bridgeman**

Olivia Kimbrell Press

**Genre:** Romance





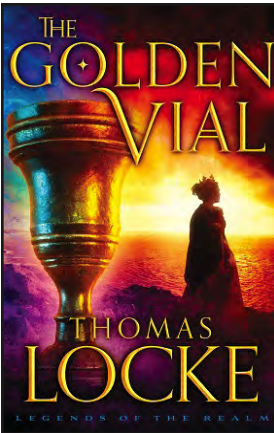
**A FAMILY FOR EASTER**

RESCUE RIVER #6

**Lee Tobin McClain**

Love Inspired

**Genre:** Romance



**THE GOLDEN VIAL**

LEGENDS OF THE REALM #3

**Thomas Locke**

Revell

**Genre:** Speculative



**FIERIAN**

ABIASSA'S FIRE #3

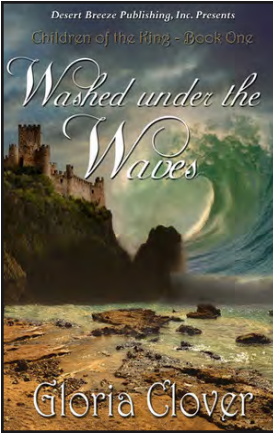
**Ronie Kendig**

Enclave

**Genre:** Speculative



New Releases: March 2018



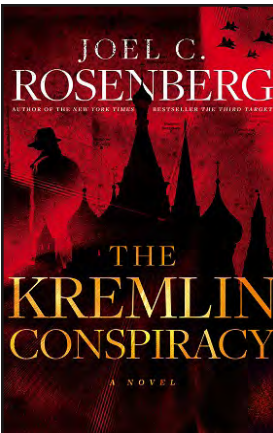
**WASHED UNDER THE WAVES**

CHILDREN OF THE KING #1

**Gloria Clover**

By The Vine Press

**Genres:** Speculative, Romance



**THE KREMLIN CONSPIRACY**

**Joel C. Rosenberg**

Tyndale House

**Genre:** Suspense



**IF I LIVE**

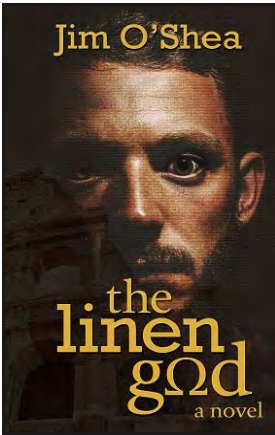
IF I RUN #3

**Terri Blackstock**

Zondervan

**Genres:** Suspense, Romance



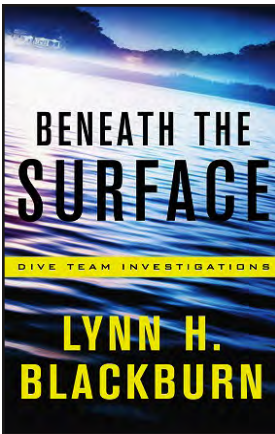


**THE LINEN GOD**

*Jim O'Shea*

Ambassador International

**Genre:** Suspense



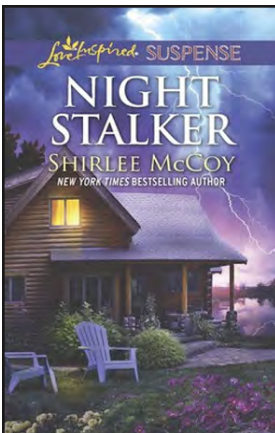
**BENEATH THE SURFACE**

DIVE TEAM INVESTIGATIONS #1

*Lynn H. Blackburn*

Revell

**Genres:** Suspense, Romance



**NIGHT STALKER**

FBI: SPECIAL CRIMES UNIT #1

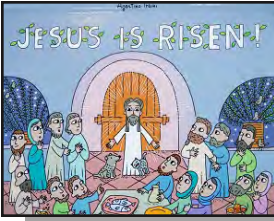
*Shirlee McCoy*

Love Inspired Suspense

**Genres:** Suspense, Romance



**New Releases: March 2018**

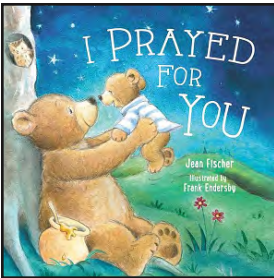


***JESUS IS RISEN!:  
AN EASTER POP-UP BOOK***

***Agostino Traini (Author, Illustrator)***

Sparkhouse Family

**Genre:** Children's



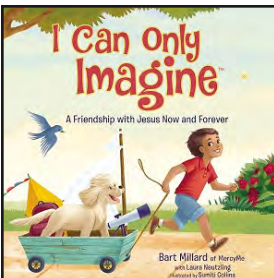
***I PRAYED FOR YOU***

***Jean Fischer,***

***Illustrated by Frank Endersby***

Thomas Nelson

**Genre:** Children's



***I CAN ONLY IMAGINE: A FRIENDSHIP  
WITH JESUS NOW AND FOREVER***

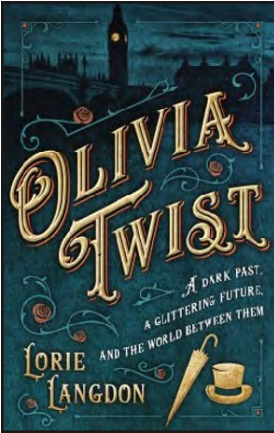
***Bart Millard with Laura Neutzling,***

***illustrated by Sumiti Collina***

Thomas Nelson

**Genre:** Children's



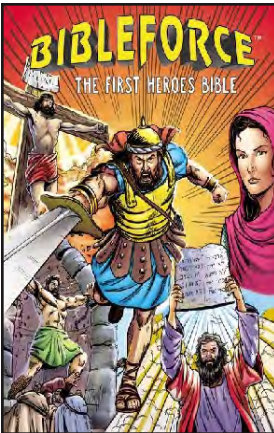


**OLIVIA TWIST**

**Lorie Langdon**

Blink

**Genres:** YA/Teen, Historical, Suspense



**BIBLEFORCE:**

**THE FIRST HEROES BIBLE**

Thomas Nelson

**Genres:** Children, Comics



**THE SAVIOR**

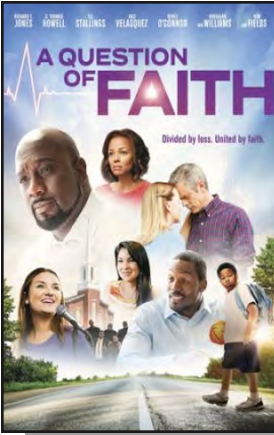
**Robert Savo (Director)**

Vision Video

**Genres:** Historical, Movies



New Releases: March 2018

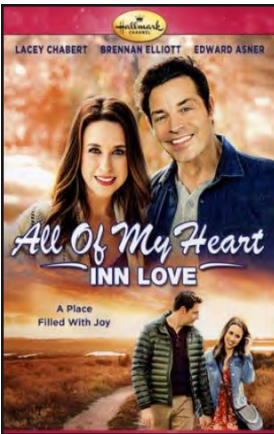


**A QUESTION OF FAITH**

**Kevan Otto (Director)**

Universal Pictures Home Entertainment

**Genres:** Contemporary, Movies



**ALL OF MY HEART: INN LOVE**

**Terry Ingram (Director)**

Hallmark

**Genres:** Romance, Movies



**UNDESERVED**

Bridgestone Multimedia Group

**Genres:** Contemporary, Movies

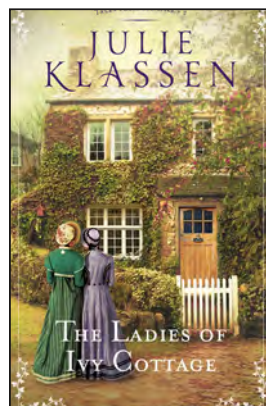




# A QUICK LOOK AT SOME OF THE BESTSELLING TITLES FOR DECEMBER 2017

## HISTORICAL FICTION

- 1**    *The Ladies of Ivy Cottage*  
Julie Klassen  
Baker Publishing Group
- 2**    *Treasured Grace*  
Tracie Peterson  
Baker Publishing Group
- 3**    *Beloved Hope*  
Tracie Peterson  
Baker Publishing Group
- 4**    *The Innkeeper of Ivy Hill*  
Julie Klassen  
Baker Publishing Group
- 5**    *Cherished Mercy*  
Tracie Peterson  
Baker Publishing Group

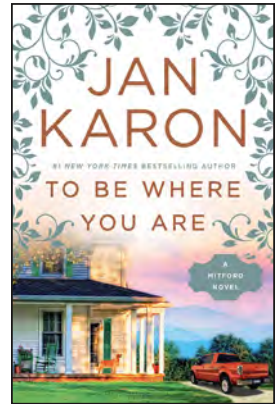


To see the entire list of bestselling books go to:  
<http://cbaonline.org/december-2017-best-sellers>

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

CONTEMPORARY

- 1**     ***To Be Where You Are***  
Jan Karon  
Penguin/Putnam
- 2**     ***The Undoing of Saint Silvanus***  
Beth Moore  
Tyndale House
- 3**     ***A Time to Stand***  
Robert Whitlow  
Thomas Nelson
- 4**     ***The Christmas Blessing***  
Melody Carlson  
Baker Publishing Group
- 5**     ***When Crickets Cry***  
Charles Martin  
Thomas Nelson

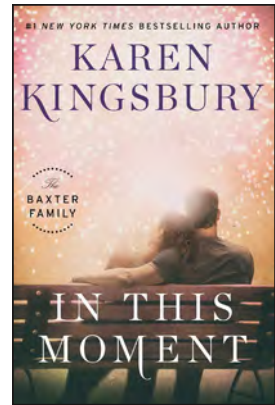


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ROMANCE

- 1**     ***In This Moment***  
Karen Kingsbury  
Howard Books/  
Simon & Schuster
- 2**     ***Finding Father Christmas  
& Engaging Father  
Christmas***  
Robin Jones Gunn  
Hachette Book Group
- 3**     ***The Proving***  
Beverly Lewis  
Baker Publishing Group
- 4**     ***A Baxter Family Christmas***  
Karen Kingsbury  
Howard Books/Simon & Schuster
- 5**     ***Love Story***  
Karen Kingsbury  
Howard Books/Simon & Schuster

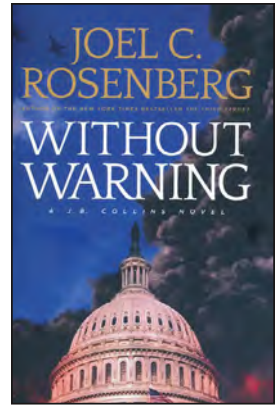


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SUSPENSE/MYSTERY

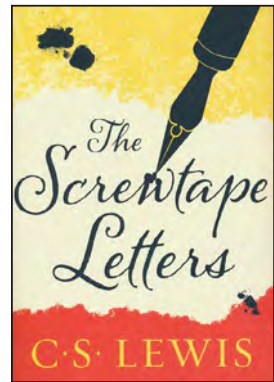
- 1**     ***Without Warning***  
Joel C. Rosenberg  
Tyndale House
- 2**     ***The Book of Mysteries***  
Jonathan Cahn  
Charisma
- 3**     ***The Harbinger***  
Jonathan Cahn  
Charisma
- 4**     ***Dangerous Illusions***  
Irene Hannon  
Baker Publishing Group
- 5**     ***If I Run***  
Terri Blackstock  
Zondervan



To see the entire list of bestselling books go to:  
**<http://cbaonline.org/december-2017-best-sellers>**

SPECULATIVE/FANTASY/SCI-FI

- 1**     ***The Screwtape Letters***  
C. S. Lewis  
Zondervan
- 2**     ***The Beautiful Pretender***  
Melanie Dickerson  
Thomas Nelson
- 3**     ***Hinds' Feet on High Places***  
Hannah Hurnard  
Tyndale House
- 4**     ***The Great Divorce***  
C. S. Lewis  
Zondervan
- 5**     ***This Present Darkness***  
Frank Peretti  
Crossway Books



To see the entire list of bestselling books go to:  
**<http://cbaonline.org/december-2017-best-sellers>**

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publish a book.**

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