

# Family Fiction

June 2016

## edge



**MIKE  
DELLOSSO**  
With the Perfect Beach Read

**JOSHUA A.  
JOHNSTON**  
Meet Debut Author

An Exclusive with  
**SADIE  
ROBERTSON**

PLUS Billy Coffey &  
Catherine Finger



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Excerpt from *Shattered by Death* by Catherine Finger in this issue!





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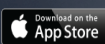
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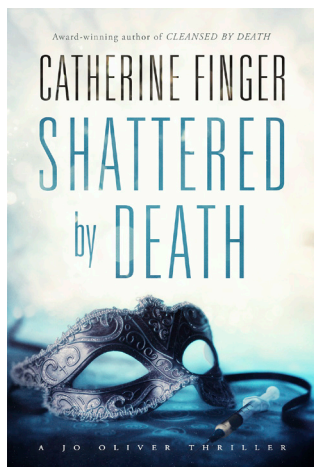
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# DEPARTMENTS

## START READING NOW!!

Excerpt from *Shattered by Death*  
by Catherine Finger in this issue!

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**ONE QUESTION:**  
If you could only read  
one author for the rest  
of your life, whom would  
you pick and why?



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## SUSPENSE



**Catherine Finger**

*Plus New Releases*

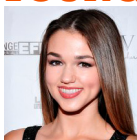
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**Billy Coffey**

*Plus New Releases*

## YOUNG ADULT



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## WHO WE ARE

### DEIDRA ROMERO



Deidra Romero is a blogger and bookworm. She loves good company, good coffee and a good story.  
[www.parentingupstream.com](http://www.parentingupstream.com)

### REL MOLLET



Rel Mollet resides in Melbourne, Australia, with her movie-loving husband and three book-loving daughters.  
[www.RelzReviewz.com](http://www.RelzReviewz.com)

### C.J. DARLINGTON



C.J., the author of *Bound by Guilt*, is the cofounder of *TitleTrakk.com*.  
[www.cjdarlington.com](http://www.cjdarlington.com)

### BROCK EASTMAN



Brock Eastman is the author of *The Quest for Truth* series by P&R Publishing and *Focus* on the Family. He's a husband and a daddy and loves to spend time with his family.  
[www.BrockEastman.com](http://www.BrockEastman.com)

# FamilyFiction edge

A PUBLICATION OF SALEM PUBLISHING, A DIVISION OF  
SALEM COMMUNICATIONS CORP. [NASDAQ: SALM]  
402 BNA DRIVE, SUITE 400, NASHVILLE, TN 37217-2509  
PHONE: 615.386.3011 FAX: 615.312.4266  
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**MANAGING EDITOR** | DEIDRA ROMERO  
DROMERO@SALEMPUBLISHING.COM

**SENIOR ART DIRECTOR &  
ASSISTANT PRODUCTION MANAGER** | PAULA ROZELLE HANBACK

**CONTRIBUTORS** | C. J. DARLINGTON, GLORIA JOHNSON,  
DEIDRA ROMERO, REL MOLLET,  
CASSIE BAKER

**PUBLISHER** | MICHAEL MILLER

**GENERAL MANAGER  
ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER** | SMITTY WHEELER

**ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER  
MIXED MEDIA PRODUCTION** | ROSS CLUVER

**EDITORIAL DIRECTOR** | CHRIS WELL

**FULFILLMENT & CUSTOMER  
SERVICE MANAGER** | SUZANNE SOLINGER

**CUSTOMER SERVICE  
REPRESENTATIVES** | JASON LLOYD,  
JANICE COLLIER ARSENAULT

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS  
OF ADVERTISING** | DEDE DONATELLI-TARRANT,  
805.987.5072  
JOEL STOMBRES,  
630.584.0213

**ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE** | JON EDLIN,  
913.231.7333

**WEB AD TRAFFIC DIRECTOR** | TAMARA PHILLIPS

**ADVERTISING INFORMATION**  
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# SUMMER SUSPENSE

*Deidra Romero*







## Mike Delloso with a Must-Read Thriller

If you are looking for the perfect beach read this summer, look no further! Mike Delloso's Jed Patrick series (Tyndale House) is a thrilling suspenseful read that includes government conspiracies, lost identities and brain washing. It's in the vein of the Bourne movies and will keep you ripping through the pages, racing to the end! The second installment in the Jed Patrick series just released. We caught up with Mike to get more details about where the storyline picks up.

**W**ithout giving too much away for readers who have yet to read the first book in the series, *Kill Devil* picks up several weeks after *Centralia* and much has changed for our protagonist. Mike will be the first to tell you his main character, Jed, is not one you typically find in Christian fiction books. His faith is central to who he is, but he doesn't have it all together. Jed wrestles with his faith and is in a "constant state of discovery and learning, but his beliefs are central to why he does what he does and how he keeps grounded while doing it." Jed is also a tough guy with a soft spot for his family. "What really separates Jed from a lot of the other heroes we meet in fiction is that he is a family man."

Mike confesses there's a bit of himself in Jed's character. "I love stories of intrigue, especially if they have a military or government component. Jason Bourne. Jack Reacher. Jack Ryan. Mitch Rapp. They all fascinate me. I also have a soft spot for government conspiracies

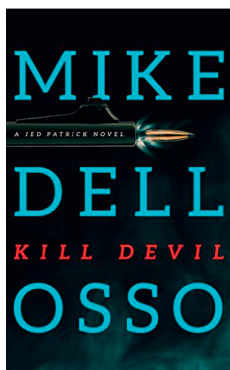
and cover-ups. And I'm a family man. So put those three together and you have the inspiration for the Jed Patrick stories."

Mike also told us that this entire series is different from his previous works. First of all, it is the first sequel he has ever written—all of his previous books are stand-alone—and also because this series doesn't have any supernatural elements. "For me, that's a subtle difference in the suspense or thrills

of the stories but a huge difference in the way I crafted the story, the mood, the pacing, the themes. It was an adjustment, to be sure."

Mike's writing has been hailed by many and even compared to Ted Dekker's in a review by the *Library Journal*. If you like books that keep you guessing and second-guessing, you will love the Jed Patrick series. "The books are fast-paced and intriguing so they move quickly and keep the reader's attention. And they're interesting," says Mike.

And if you love the Jed Patrick series, Mike said he has no plans of stopping anytime soon. "As long as evil is in the world, men like Jed Patrick are needed. Seriously, Jed's no superhero but his character is such that many more books could be written." **FFE**



**KILL DEVIL**  
JED PATRICK #2  
*Mike Delloso*  
Tyndale House

READ MORE ONLINE! <http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/mike-delloso/books/kill-devil-jed-patrick-2/>

If you love suspenseful crime thrillers, check these out!



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# EDGE OF OBLIVION

A New Space Exploration Adventure Series  
by Joshua A. Johnston

*Brock D. Eastman*



Joshua A. Johnston explores the far reaches of space with his writing. Whether he's taking on starships, aliens or strange new worlds, this is his pursuit. We're about to take an inside look at his new book release, *Edge of Oblivion*, from Enclave Publishing.

**Brock: Joshua, thanks for joining us. What started this love for science fiction and exploring the vast concepts behind space?**

*Joshua:* I grew up with a real affinity for science fiction, both on television and in the written form, but I also realized that relatively little of what I watched and read dealt with faith in any substantive way. Isaac Asimov, who was not particularly religious, nevertheless lamented about the dearth of science fiction that explored the relationship between God and extraterrestrial life. Part of the reason is that so many science fiction authors were and are humanists, so their worlds marginalize religion as being anti-intellectual or just ignore the subject entirely. At some point I figured, why not try my hand at it myself? Why not see if I could craft a story that incorporated both faith and aliens? That's where *Edge of Oblivion* came from.

**Brock: For *Edge of Oblivion*, you've developed several unique characters. Can you tell us about them?**

*Joshua:* The primary cast of *Edge of Oblivion* serves together in a sort of interspecies Navy. Their ship is a small interceptor called the Retaelus, and it specializes in rooting out the pirates that plague the trade lanes between planets. The captain and communications officer are both humans; the weapons officer, sciences officer and engineer are all non-humans, extraterrestrials from other worlds.



Part of the fun of the story is finding out both about the officers themselves and the alien races they come from. On one level, you learn about their cultures and distinct racial traits, but you also learn about the individuals—their pasts and hopes, their accomplishments and failures—and some of their secrets.

**Brock: In three words, what is this book about?**

*Joshua:* Epic. Space. Adventure.

**Brock: Is science fiction your favorite genre to write for?**

*Joshua:* Definitely. I love the idea of being able to create worlds outside of our own and explore them. Exploration is one of the underlying themes of this trilogy, and I hope readers are as excited to visit these new worlds as I was in writing them.

**Brock: What are some of the strongest influences on your writing?**

*Joshua:* Lots of names come to mind. Edgar Rice Burroughs did some amazing world building with the

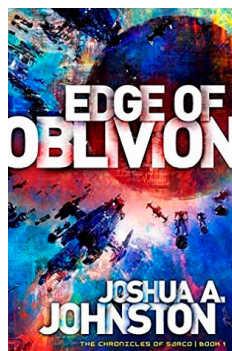
John Carter novels. Isaac Asimov's books were grand and epic, and Robert Heinlein's books were just really solid adventures, especially his earlier works. And as much as I talked earlier about science fiction being a humanist domain, Orson Scott Card and Frank Herbert have done some interesting things in exploring how faith fits in with science fiction.

**Brock: Have you done any other writing besides fiction?**

*Joshua:* Over the years I've done a fair bit of writing on other subjects. I'm a former senior editor and now contributor to Nintendojo, a fansite devoted to games for Nintendo consoles and handhelds. I also chip in with some articles on parenting for a website called Mumbling Mommy, for which my wife works as an editor.

**Brock: What are your favorite nonfiction titles?**

*Joshua:* My degree is in history, so I've read a fair bit on that subject over the years. I enjoy reading up on American presidents, especially as historians re-evaluate their presidencies over time. I also love a good nonfiction adventure tale: one of my favorites is Alfred Lansing's *Endurance*, an incredible and very true story of Ernest Shackleton, who led a crew through a series of harrowing ordeals in the Antarctic during the 1910s. **FFE**



**EDGE OF OBLIVION**

THE CHRONICLES  
OF SARCO #1

Joshua A. Johnston  
Enclave Publishing

If you could only read one author for the rest of your life, whom would you pick and why?



**RONIE KENDIG:** I would definitely choose **C.S. Lewis**, because there is such an incredible depth to his writings that I could spend a century digging through them without repetition or boredom. A boon is that he wrote both fiction and nonfiction, and there are even his personal letters that survive. Lewis had a preternatural wisdom, so not only would I learn more, but I would learn deeper.

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/ronie-kendig/>

**RENE GUTTERIDGE:** Oh my goodness! That is a hard, hard question! How could I even begin? Okay, one author—I guess it would be **C.S. Lewis**—fiction and nonfiction writer, lots of gold mines to find inside his writing, and good, strong themes to keep me going. But I'm not happy about this question! It would be torture!

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/rene-gutteridge/>



**GILLIAN BRONTE ADAMS:** **J.R.R. Tolkien.** Hands down. Tolkien's works were woven into my childhood through late nights curled in my dad's lap for a read aloud, the massive red book I kept at the foot of my bed when I went to sleep, and the aluminum foil "Sting" my dad made so I could fight off orcs in the night. To me, Tolkien is home ... and Tolkien is adventure. His books taught me to be brave, to willingly forsake the comforts of the familiar and venture into the wild unknown where dragons lurk. And to do so even if I have nothing more than the courage and pluck and plain common sense of a hobbit.

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/gillian-bronte-adams/>

**MELANIE DICKERSON:** Assuming **God** (the Bible) is excluded, I would have to say **Siri Mitchell**, since her books are so diverse and smart and have amazing historical atmosphere. As a runner-up, I'd pick **Judith Merkle Riley**, since I love her Margaret of Ashbury series, and the main character of Margaret is so real, like a dear friend. I love her!

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/melanie-dickerson/>





This summer enjoy a fast-paced suspense novel about Jo, a police chief, on the trail of a serial killer. Suddenly, the tables turn when Jo realizes the killer is attempting to frame her—and she definitely looks guilty after the death of her abusive husband. Catherine Finger takes readers on an adventure, and she answers our questions about the making of this novel!



**This book is about a female police chief and her interactions with a serial killer. What type of research did you have to conduct for this novel?**

The choice of a female police chief relates to my desire to portray a strong woman in a predominantly male field. And while I've never been a police chief personally, I serve as a high school superintendent in my "real life," and have a good grasp of female leaders. I have a few dear police chief buddies. Once I discovered that our professional lives were quite similar—in that we spent most of our time on personnel and politics—I knew I could write from the heart about a female police chief.

Over the past five years, I have interviewed a variety of male and female law enforcement officers, and had the opportunity to join them for ride-alongs. I also have a number of friends in various branches of the military and they've added depth to my novels and helped with some of the fight scenes. And this summer I look forward to spending a day at the

FBI headquarters with other writers in Manhattan during the annual THRILLERFEST conference. I had the opportunity to join this group of writers and special agents last year and found it fascinating.

**Do you read and watch a lot of material about true crimes? If so, can you tell us some of the cases that have captivated you?**

I really don't like true crime shows or material! I prefer my monsters to be more easily defeated, you know, like zombies ... While I do love suspense and intrigue, I am truly not a fan of true crime shows or books. My mind is my best feature and I don't like to clutter it up with imagery that has the capacity to damage my soul, or hurt my heart. That said, I love shows and books that give you a wild ride with a lot of suspense, with crimes happening almost "off screen" while keeping the tension high. I'm hooked on *The Blacklist*, and this may date me, but I loved *Alias*, *The X-Files*, *Justified* and *Longmire*. I love, love,

love Agatha Christie and still enjoy her books. I would say the same about John Macdonald's books, and my life has not been the same since reading Chandler's *The Long Goodbye*.

### **What makes Jo, your main character, a likable character?**

Jo Oliver is a fabulously flawed heroine. She has the soul of a warrior with the heart of a mother, and she is driven by a passion for justice. I think my readers relate to her impulsivity, her tendency to ignore what is wonderful in her life when she is in the midst of a struggle, and her ability to pull herself out of the mire and get back to a place of gratitude. When I think about Jo Oliver, I smile, and two words always come to mind: *gravitas* and *ganas*.

### **You also touch on domestic abuse in this book. Why is that a topic you wanted to cover?**

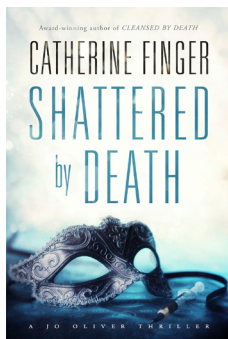
While domestic abuse touches the lives of both men and women, one in four women will experience domestic abuse at some point in

her life in our country. There is no stereotypical woman target of this epidemic. People from all walks of life encounter domestic abuse, though they might not ever put a name to it.

As I thought about the kind of protagonist I wanted to create, I knew I wanted her to have a central struggle emanating from a "secret" in her life that she did not cause and could not control. I want my readers to know my heroine's secret and to have a sense of empathy for her, but also to worry about what she'll do next. Some of her choices make more sense when viewed against the backdrop of an experience with abuse. I think it intensifies her sense of duty and imbues her with a deep-seated desire to defend the unprotected and to bring abusers—and killers—to justice.

### **What's your secret for keeping the stakes high and readers on the edge of their seat?**

I'm a woman with a strong bias for action—always have been, always will be! I love to read stories that keep me guessing, surprise me with grace and hope, and keep me moving. I write the kind of stories I'd love to read. Integrating action into my stories at every turn escalates the pace. Keeping the timeline tight also helps me ramp up the action. When things start to drag, I challenge myself to come up with something interesting—the scarier the better!

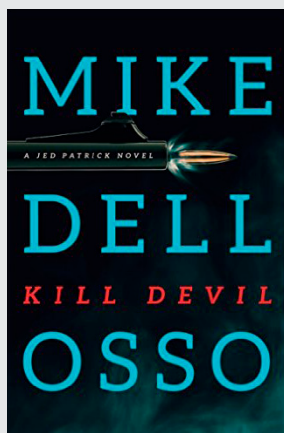


**SHATTERED BY DEATH**  
*Catherine Finger*  
Hope Springs Publisher

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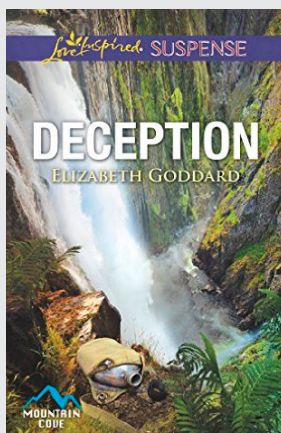


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**KILL DEVIL**

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*Mike Delosso*  
Tyndale House



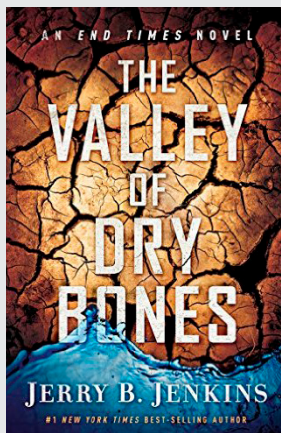
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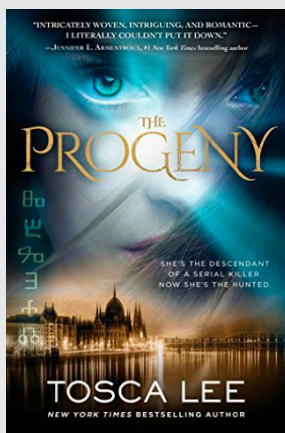
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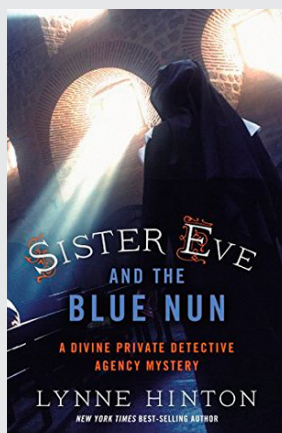
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*Jerry B. Jenkins*  
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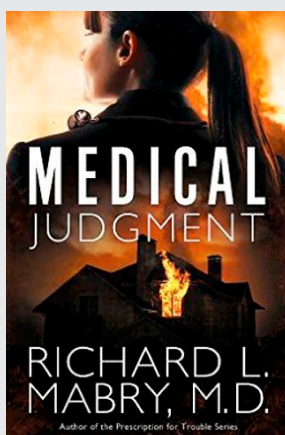
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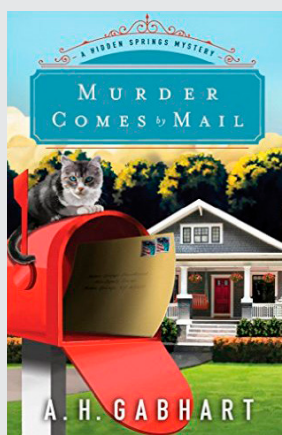
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 DESCENDANTS OF THE  
 HOUSE OF BATHORY  
*Tosca Lee*  
 Howard Books



**SISTER EVE & THE BLUE NUN**  
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 AGENCY MYSTERY #2  
*Lynne Hinton*  
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**MEDICAL JUDGMENT**  
*Richard L. Mabry, M.D.*  
 Abingdon Press



**MURDER COMES BY MAIL**  
 HIDDEN SPRINGS MYSTERIES #2  
*Ann Gabhart*  
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Billy Coffey's latest release, *There Will be Stars*, is set once again in his unique, fictional town of Mattingly. Bobby falls asleep after a tragic car accident and finds himself reliving the same day, but this isn't just an ordinary dream. He can't seem to wake up and others are trapped with him. We asked Billy about his mind-bending novel and the inspiration behind the plot.

**Did you always plan on revisiting Mattingly or did you decide the set it there much later?**

"Coming home" was always in my mind for this one. *The Curse of Crow Hollow* was my first novel set outside of Mattingly. So it was nice to spend a book roaming familiar streets and woods and seeing some familiar faces.

**What makes Mattingly a good setting?**

The small-town feel is one I think a lot of readers can appreciate and be drawn into, especially in a Southern setting. There's a simplicity to it that's appealing. And it's nice to be able to reintroduce certain characters back into certain books so that their arcs aren't limited to a single story, but carry over. They become threads that tie the novels together even though each novel can stand on its own. Mattingly seems like such a bucolic and peaceful place on the surface, but there's a lot going on underneath. I like that dichotomy; it reminds me so much

of the human heart. But my favorite aspect of Mattingly is that it allows me to peer into some big issues through a small lens.

**Can you tell us about your main character in this book and what makes him an interesting protagonist?**

Readers who have followed my books will know the name Bobby Barnes. He's popped up in several novels before, each time a little more broken and leaving an even darker cloud in his wake. Every small town I've ever known has that person known as the town drunk. That's Bobby. It was tough at first to center a novel around such an unsympathetic character. My editor had her reservations. But the great thing about starting off with someone so spoiled is that it leaves the door open for redemption, and that's a running theme through all of my stories. And another great thing is that I believe we can identify with a person's vices much more than we can their virtues. Because we're all

broken, aren't we? We're all broken people living in a broken world. The trick is to find the beauty in all of those cracks, and that's what Bobby manages in the end.

**There's a lot of suspense and supernatural elements in this book, which has kind of become your niche. How did you dream up this plot?**

It's kind of funny that the plot for this book grew out of such a mundane idea. I was at the hardware store about a year ago and ran into a guy I graduated from high school with. Hadn't seen him in probably 20 years. We got to talking about how things were way back when, all the stupid things we did and all the dreams we had, all of our passion about the future. And that led to where we'd come all these years later—both of us married, both of us raising teenagers, both of us working at jobs that paid the bills but offered little else. And he looked at me and said, "What in the world happened to us?" Well, life happened. We grew up and gained new responsibilities. We were like most everyone else, spending most

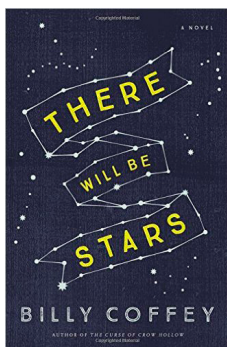
of our energy just trying to keep our heads above the water. That's a tough thing for a lot of people to do nowadays, and a certain apathy can set in as a result. Life loses its magic. We sacrifice our passions on the altar of getting by. That sense of apathy became the seed for the story: what happens to the human heart when it stops caring?

**How was this book different from your other works?**

I've gotten a lot of reactions from readers who said this is a deep book. That's true. It's probably the deepest one I've written because it asks some hard questions. And I think that's good. There are novels that read like candy and novels that read like red meat. Both have their place, but I'm always drawn toward the meatier ones.

**Will you be writing any more stories set in Mattingly?**

My next novel is called *Some Small Magic*, which begins and ends in Mattingly but meanders deeper into Appalachia through the middle. You'll see some familiar faces there, a few characters from previous books, but many new ones as well. Mattingly will continue to be at the center of my fictional universe for a while. I've always thought of my books as separate stories that will eventually line up to tell a larger one. What that larger one might be is a question I haven't been able to answer just yet. But isn't it fun to go looking?

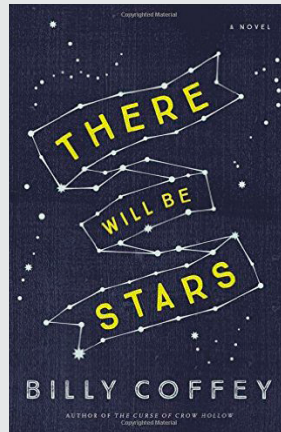


**THERE WILL BE STARS**  
Billy Coffey  
Thomas Nelson

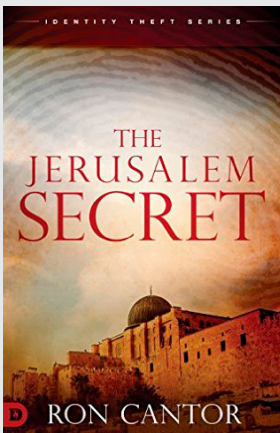
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*Lisa M. Clark*  
Concordia Publishing



**THERE WILL BE STARS**  
*Billy Coffey*  
Thomas Nelson



**THE JERUSALEM SECRET**  
*Ron Cantor*  
Destiny Image



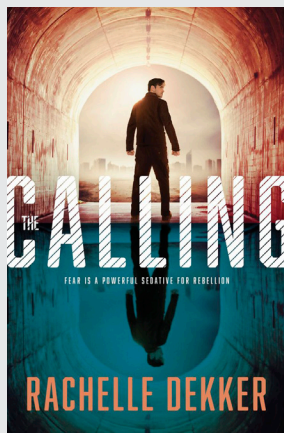
**KING'S FOLLY**  
KINSMAN CHRONICLES  
PART #1  
*Jill Williamson*  
Bethany House



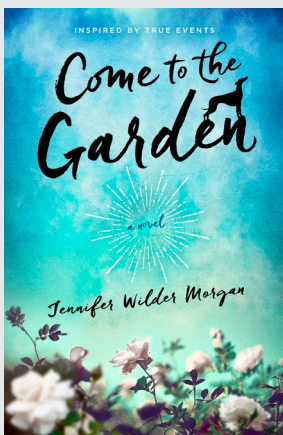
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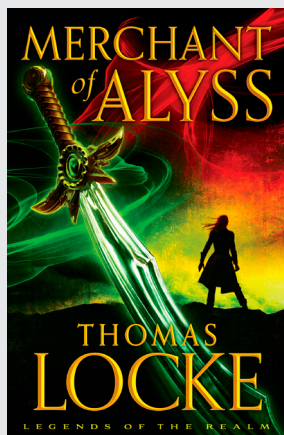
**SIREN'S SONG**  
STORM SIREN #3  
*Mary Weber*  
Thomas Nelson



**THE CALLING**  
SEER #2  
*Rachelle Dekker*  
Tyndale House

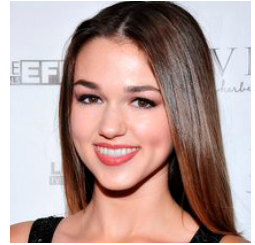


**COME TO THE GARDEN**  
*Jennifer Wilder Morgan*  
Howard Books



**MERCHANT OF ALYSS**  
LEGENDS OF THE REALM #2  
*Thomas Locke*  
Revell

The Robertson family from the hit television show *Duck Dynasty* has expanded their brand from clothing to books. Most recently, Sadie Robertson is launching her fiction debut. *Life Just got Real* (Howard Books) is about two 16-year-old girls on an unexpected journey of friendship. Sadie sat down to answer our top questions about her big break into writing!



**Where did you find the inspiration from this novel? Since one of your main characters is vying for a position on a reality show, were you able to pull from your real-life experience?**

The idea actually came from my own individual life. I thought about my life before *Duck Dynasty* and my life now. I realized that I was describing two different people. Their differences were so strong that at first they didn't see eye to eye, but eventually they came together as one to make each other better.

**What was your writing process like?**

All of my writing comes from life experiences. I never have a plan when it comes to writing, or really anything in life. I have ideas and visions but I always pray that the Lord leads me in His way and not my own. Sometimes my ideas lead to something completely different than I imagined. Flexibility and the willingness to change things up a little is very important in writing.

**Did you always want to be a writer?**

No, not at all. My writing actually started because I would get really nervous while speaking on stage. I wasn't able to get everything out that I wanted to say, so I started writing down all of my thoughts in a journal. Once I started journaling, my writing became motivational speeches and those speeches led me to capturing all of my journaling into my first book, *Live Original*.

**This is the first book in your Live Original fiction series, so I'm guessing we can expect more from you?**

I have a lot of upcoming events, such as my Live Original Tour. All of my writing has come from my life experiences. I am excited for this new journey I am about to start. I know there will be lots of memories and learning experiences. It is very possible that this experience could lead to a book. I guess you guys will have to wait and see!

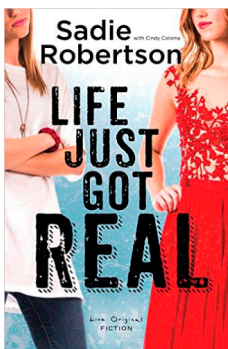
“ I ALWAYS PRAY THAT THE LORD LEADS ME IN HIS WAY AND NOT MY OWN. SOMETIMES THIS LEADS TO SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT THAN I IMAGINED.”

**What advice do you have for teens who would love to pursue a creative career like writing?**

Go for it! You never know how the Lord will speak to you and use you through this process!

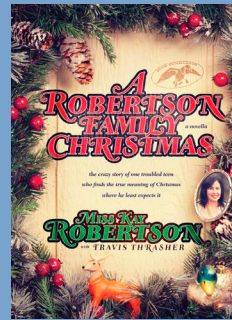
**What's next for you personally? Is college around the corner?**

I am super pumped for my Live Original Tour! It is like my own personal journal of all of my ideas is coming to life! I have decided to take off from college right now to pursue this opportunity that the Lord has placed before me.



**LIFE JUST GOT REAL**  
LIVE ORIGINAL  
*Sadie Robertson*  
Howard Books

Sadie is not the first member of her famous family to publish a book. Check out these titles penned by other Robertsons—with a little help from *FamilyFiction* fan-favorite Travis Thrasher!



**A ROBERTSON FAMILY CHRISTMAS**  
*Kay Robertson*  
with Travis Thrasher  
Tyndale House

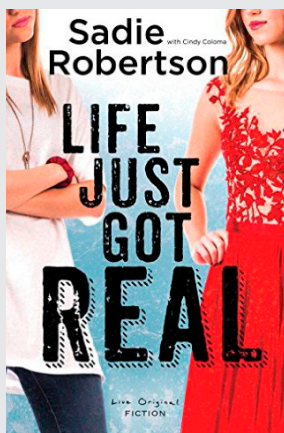


**BE YOUR OWN DUCK COMMANDER COLLECTOR SET**  
*John-Luke Robertson*  
with Travis Thrasher  
Tyndale House



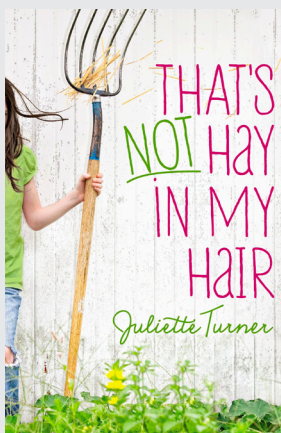
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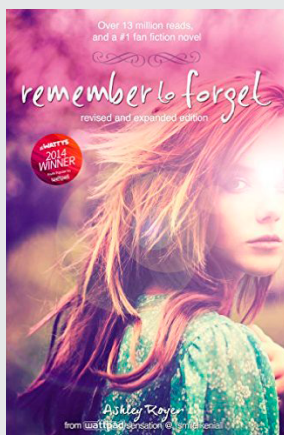
## LIFE JUST GOT REAL

LIVE ORIGINAL  
*Sadie Robertson*  
Howard Books



## THAT'S NOT HAY IN MY HAIR

*Juliette L. Turner*  
Zonderkidz



## REMEMBER TO FORGET

*Ashley Royer*  
Blink



## REMNANTS: SEASON OF GLORY

A REMNANTS NOVEL  
*Lisa T. Bergren*  
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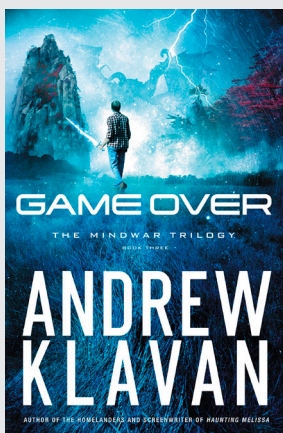
## **A DARING SACRIFICE**

UNCERTAIN  
CHOICE #2  
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REALM WALKERS #3  
*Donita K. Paul*  
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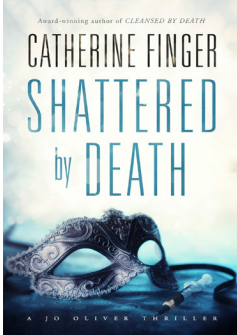
## **GAME OVER**

THE MINDWAR TRILOGY #3  
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## **CHIVALROUS**

VALIANT HEARTS  
*Dina Sleiman*  
Bethany House



## START READING NOW

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***Shattered by Death* by Catherine Finger**

*Thursday, March 24*

Fueled by visions of my famous Easter almond vanilla lamb cake, complete with rich white buttercream frosting and the requisite coconut fleece, I picked my way through the streets leading to *my* lake house. My mind clung to the symbol of the resurrection. An Easter morning cross, adorned with an artfully hung purple robe, stuck in a mound of Easter grass—bright greens and pinks, littered with jellybeans, chocolate bunnies, and peanut butter eggs.

Five minutes later, I nosed my car up the asphalt driveway curving gracefully to the McMansion I'd bought for my husband to enjoy with my replacement. Vibernum, heavy with buds, lined the entrance. I wouldn't get to see them in full bloom. I glided to a stop next to the back porch steps, noting *my* expensive electric car standing at attention in the driveway. I moved to the driver's side window, and peered in. Another woman's jacket hung carelessly on the back of the passenger side headrest. A fistful of rocks lurched through my stomach.

The car sat squarely in front of the first garage door. It was open, so they were probably inside. *What to do? Ring the doorbell? Front door? Back door?* I wasn't company, but I sure wasn't family. I steeled myself and sashayed right through the garage to the back door like I owned the place. Because heck, I still *did* own the place.

I rapped on the door. Silence. I knocked again—louder—three times in a row, bracing myself for the clack of mincing, four-inch-stiletto-clad



footsteps on my hardwood floors. The pitter-patter of my marriage walking out the door of no return.

Nothing.

I retreated down the steps and walked out of the garage in slow, measured steps. *I know they're here. They must be...* Fresh air breezed across my face as I looked down the hill at the boat house on the edge of the lake. Mist steamed off the water. In some alternate universe, Del and I might have been sitting at the end of that dock, drinking coffee, greeting the new day together. But that world had only existed in my fantasies.

I should offer a quick prayer. *But what if God doesn't really want me here? Better to keep Him out of this right now. I'll pray later. God might not be as invested in getting back my holiday china as I am.* I took a few deep breaths and headed to the boathouse. *Sorry God. We'll talk later.*

At the bottom of the hill, a shudder ran through me, forging iron posts where my feet had been. Shivers jiggled up and down my spine, and the hair on my arms spiked up. I headed toward the water. A few months ago, I had walked out onto the dock with Del. He, laden with a fragrant bag of pastries, walked with one arm too firmly wrapped around me. I, for one mad moment, was stiff with the certainty that he wanted to shove me into the icy waters. How had I not seen the end of my marriage coming? *And where was God when I needed Him? Why hadn't He stepped in and stopped the destruction?*

Reaching the bench, I thumped down on it. How stupidly proud of this bench he'd once been, and of how he'd "requisitioned" it from the city. *"What's the difference between 'requisition' and stealing, Del?"*

*"Can't you just shut it, Jo? Or are you going to ruin another day in paradise for me?"*

We see what we want to see. I sat a moment longer. If this bench could have taken me back to the way things were, would I have stayed seated? Or would I have been strong enough to get up, move, and find my own path forward?

I jumped up and walked to the boathouse. Over-sized porthole windows flanked the doors facing the lake. Someone had moved a large storage cabinet in front of one of the windows. A piece of dark cloth hung crookedly inside the other. *Odd.*

The heavy plank doors hung open several inches. Were they inside? Gentle splashing against the dock, the breeze flowing through the river

birch, and morning birds all sounded in the early spring air. No noise came from within the shed. What were they doing if they were in there?  
*Do I really want to know?*

I conjured up the image of my porcelain soup tureen, with its hand-painted tulips and violets adorning the edges and smooth, white, rabbit-shaped handle. Andy'd made it clear I had to ask for the few remaining things I really wanted back, and that's exactly what I was going to do.

*Ask permission.* A streak of fire raged through me. I shook my head to wipe it away.

I stood a few feet back from the door of the boathouse. Something was very wrong. Dizziness rolled over me as an assault of thick smells wafted out between the heavy doors. I braced my feet, willing myself to stop moving forward. Even though the scents were repelling, I leaned in.

I could reach out and touch the doors. Every fiber of my being screamed '*don't.*' I leaned in a little further. Until it hit. An odiferous attack—a tangy metallic mixed up with mildew, turpentine, rust, and earthworms.

There was the telltale buzzing. I put my hand on the door handle, creaking it open several more inches. The buzzing gave way for a moment. Positioned within five feet of the door, as if it were pointing, was a bloody deck shoe.

I followed the line of the shoe to the edge of a dark red pool of blood—the way to my husband and his lover, holding each other closer in death than he and I had ever been in life. Then, I ran out of breath. I was screaming at the top of my lungs.

I clenched my hand over my mouth, backed away from the boathouse, turned, and threw up.

Automatically, I pulled out my work cell and hit 9-1-1. "This is Haversport Chief of Police Jo Oliver, calling from my home at 1020 Loon Drive in Wauconda. Reporting a double homicide. Of my husband and his mistress. I found them on the floor of my boathouse on Bangs Lake."

Dispatch asked rapid-fire questions, words floating around me, dreamlike.

"...double homicide ... your husband, ma'am?"

"Yes, my husband and his mistress."

"Ma'am?"

"Officer Del Reed. And his girlfriend. Send out teams *stat.*"

I hung up while she was asking me to stay on the line, scrolling through

pictures to find Nick's chiseled features, his flawless olive skin. I pressed my thumb against his cheek and waited for the solid comfort of his voice in my ear. *Please be here for me again, Nick.*

He answered on the first ring. "Hello, beautiful."

"Nick..."

"What's wrong?"

This man who knew me so well would sense the tremble in my voice that no one else could hear. "Nick! I need you. Come. Please, just come. Now."

"Where are you? I'm on my way."

"I'm at the boathouse."

"The boathouse? Why?"

"They're dead. Both of them."

"Dead? Del?"

"Yes."

"Both of them?"

"Yes."

"The girlfriend?"

"Yes!"

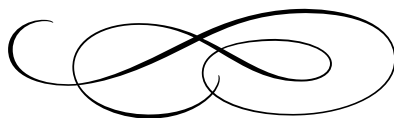
"Just stay put. I'll be there in ten minutes. Have you called it in?"

"Yes, just before I called you."

"Don't touch anything. Don't move. I'll be right there."

I clung to Nick's voice like a lifeline. The best of the best the FBI had to offer—a man I might have married in another time and place. I needed all the power that Nick Vitarello could rain down on any crime scene in the United States with just one phone call.

*If I ever needed you, I need you now.*





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