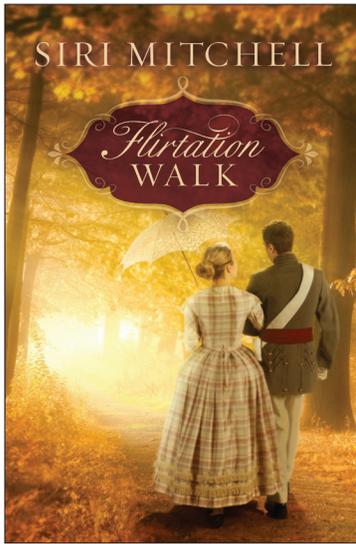




**QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH SIRI MITCHELL**



**Flirtation Walk**

by Siri Mitchell

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**1. What inspired you to write this story?**

While I was researching a different book, I discovered that the cadet who graduated last at West Point used to receive a dollar from all the other cadets in the class. I also learned that holding on to that position often required genius rather than stupidity. To graduate last in the class, grades and comportment had to be low, but not so low that a cadet would be dismissed. You'd have to study just enough to squeak by, but not quite so much that you'd do too well. In fact, you'd have to be quite smart in how you went about it. It made me wonder what it would take for a cadet who was at the top of his class to sink to the bottom and whether it could be done in just one semester. I decided to create a heroine with the opposite trajectory, one who was working her way from the bottom of society to the top.

**2. You have some personal experience with military academies.**

I do! My husband is a graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. Through the years, I've had the privilege of meeting many of his classmates as well as graduates from the other service academies. I also worked at the Air Force Academy as a civilian.

**3. What was the most surprising thing you learned during your research?**

This is the third time I've featured the military in my stories. The first two times were in contemporary settings. In researching the history of West Point for this book, I was struck by just how little the life of a cadet has changed through the centuries.

**4. What is the significance of the title?**

*Flirtation Walk* is a path along the northeastern edge of the West Point military reservation that overlooks the Hudson River. It has a reputation as West Point's "Lover's Lane" and is just as popular now as it was in the nineteenth century. It's strictly off limits to visitors, however; in order to walk that lovely path, you have to be escorted by a cadet.

**5. Is a story set at the West Point of the 1850s still relevant today?**

I think so. I hope so! At its foundation, this story is about two people who are trying their very best to portray themselves as being different than they truly are. Most of us do the same thing every day. We try to seem better, kinder, less judgmental than we really are. Or we relax the morals we grew up with to try to fit in with those around us. To quote my heroine's father, we assume that "seeming is the same as being." But in both cases, the wider community misses out on who we are and the unique talents and abilities we bring to our world.

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