



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH REGINA JENNINGS

1. *Love in the Balance* opens with Bailey confessing his shortcomings before the church—and Molly’s parents—in a scene that is both hilarious and horrifying. Please tell us this scenario was a product of your imagination.

I’m afraid it’s a composite of some true train-wreck testimonies I’ve heard over the years. In my Protestant experience, public confessions have been made at times when a private conversation would’ve been more appropriate. Sometimes in the rush to clear their conscience, people have implicated others without their consent.

Molly’s reaction to his confession is pure imagination. I’m sure it’s happened somewhere, but not while I was present.

2. Readers will remember Molly Lovelace from *Sixty Acres and a Bride*. What kind of trouble is she into now?

Molly is smart in ways that aren’t necessarily appreciated by the people around her. The role that she’s been trained for doesn’t fulfill her, but when her family situation changes, her resolve to make her own decisions begins to feel selfish. She’s torn between keeping her independence and sacrificing for her family. How much can they ask of her when helping them could keep her from the man she loves?

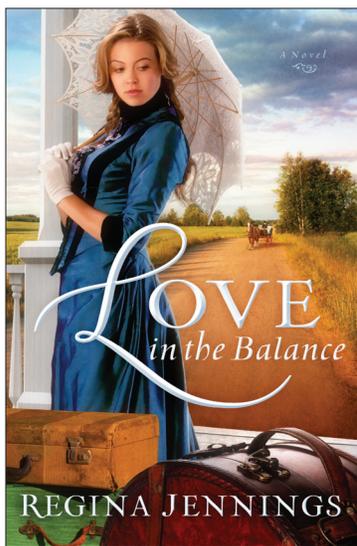
3. This book takes place in Texas in the late 1800s. How is it relevant for today’s readers?

Readers will relate to the heroes as they try to discern what is right. While Molly is deciding how much help she can afford to give her parents, Bailey has his own difficulties. He’s a sincere, devout young man who struggles with temptation...especially the kind that he and Molly tend to wander into. When he asks for accountability he unintentionally impresses his congregation, which is eager to set him up as a good example. Before he realizes what’s happened, Bailey is burdened with a sterling reputation he hasn’t earned.

Who hasn’t felt like a fraud at some point? We know the standard at which we aim and we know how far from the target we stray. If Satan is on the prowl looking for whom he may devour, Christians seem to hound people with unrealistic expectations—from a new celebrity convert to a tired saint who’s hid his struggles for years. Bailey finds himself caught between doing the right thing and saving his reputation.

4. Is the setting of *Love in the Balance* based on an actual location?

Yes, Prairie Lea and Lockhart are real towns in Caldwell County, Texas, and my research influenced the story dramatically. For instance, I learned there had once been a prosperous mill in Prairie Lea owned by the Mooney family. In fact, one of the few streets in the town is named Mill Street and it leads to the river, but there’s only a cow pasture there now. Fortunately I heard about Zedler’s Mill in nearby Luling. Zedler’s Mill was built in 1874 and has been restored to include many of the outbuildings and the owner’s home. It was my model for the Lovelaces’ mill in Prairie Lea. If you get a chance, stop by the lovely Zedler’s Mill on the San Marcos River. You might catch Bailey fishing on the banks or Molly catching a ride in the lumber wagon when her father isn’t watching.



Love in the Balance

by Regina Jennings

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5. Molly works in the property tax office. Why did you choose this vocation for her?



(photo credit Shanna Lewis)

A few years ago I fell in love with our land records office while researching the mineral rights on our property. For a history enthusiast, it was heaven. I couldn't get enough of the handwritten entries that dated from before statehood. Cross-referencing my way through the filing system was a near library-ish experience.

This memory returned when I visited Caldwell County, Texas, to research this series. Caldwell County has the most impressive county courthouse I've ever seen. Although not built until a few years after *Love in the Balance*, we can be certain that Molly Lovelace would have found this castle to be the perfect place to hide until her father's plans were thwarted.

6. *Love in the Balance* is your second book. In what ways was it more difficult than the first? How was it easier?

When I wrote *Sixty Acres and a Bride* I made a lot of beginners' mistakes. Fifty pages of backstory that had to be cut before it was sent to an editor, writing myself into corners, POV confusion—I learned a lot on that first manuscript. Writing *Love in the Balance* was a smoother process, but it had its own challenges.

Since *Love in the Balance* shares a setting and some characters with the first book, I had to work within the framework of the first story. At the same time I was thrilled to revisit Rosa, Weston, and the rest of the Garner family. Another hurdle to overcome was that I felt slightly unfaithful to write about a hero other than Weston. Silly, I know, but I wasn't ready to let him retire from leading man status. Luckily, as soon as Bailey took the stage he became a hero in his own right.

7. What's next? Are we staying in Caldwell County with the next book?

I'm currently working on the third Ladies of Caldwell County book, which will star the fascinating Anne Tillerton. While Anne and Molly share some traits, like determination and a strong sense of self-preservation, they have little else in common. Anne wouldn't wear the fancy dresses that Molly wears...in fact, there's no way she could wear a dress at all while buffalo hunting. Anne encounters Molly's brother Nicholas during a train robbery in Indian Territory, far from Caldwell County. And when the buffalo hunter finds herself saddled with an abandoned baby, she learns that even a city slicker like Nick can be helpful.