



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH STEPHANIE WHITSON

1. Explain the title *Sixteen Brides*? How did you come up with that?

I was researching another book at the Nebraska State Archives and came across a newspaper article titled “Attractive Widows.” The copy read simply, “Another cargo of war widows arrived in X last Wednesday morning, sixteen in number and filed upon claims adjacent to town. This was decidedly the best lot of widows that has arrived thus far.” I knew immediately that this was a story to be pursued... and so you have *Sixteen Brides*.

2. Does your book link to today’s news in any way? Why should people living in 2010 be interested in a book set in the 1800s?

“Hope on, Hope ever,” is a 19th century saying that the women in this book see as a framed piece of needlework hanging above the doorway of a sod house they visit. The theme of hope permeates the book. I think everyone comes up against times in their life when they are tempted to lose hope. In recent days we’ve seen horrible devastation in Haiti and Chile, and yet stories of hope come shining through those bleak moments. The problems people face don’t change, and the women in *Sixteen Brides* contemplate the same profound questions we all do. What’s wonderful about “real life” is that even in the bleakest of circumstances, those who’ve put their trust in Christ are promised the ultimate happy ending.

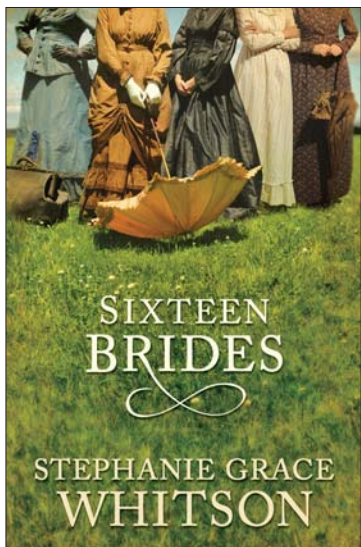
3. Did you have an over-riding theme or message in the back of your mind when you were writing *Sixteen Brides*?

Themes and messages generally come to my stories once they’re nearly finished. At some point there will be an “aha” moment, but it isn’t usually by design. Usually it’s a natural outgrowth of the challenges my characters are facing. As I think about what spiritual lesson they need, a message emerges that can speak to readers. I don’t mean to make that sound mysterious or mystical, but I just never begin a book with a sermon in mind. In the case of *Sixteen Brides*, the theme of hope honestly grew out of a note I had from doing research that mentioned a bit of needlework from the era that said “Hope on, Hope ever.” The minute I saw the note I realized that hope had fueled my characters’ heading west, and hope sustained them as they sought a new life, so the theme emerged out of what could be called a serendipity, although I prefer to think of it as God’s way of helping me write a book with an uplifting message.

4. What’s your favorite thing about the writing life? What do you dislike the most?

Hearing from readers who are kind enough to let me know when a book has touched their lives and made them feel better about something. Those letters are the thing that keeps me slogging my way through awful first drafts and re-writes and wondering what on earth I was thinking to take on life as a writer. The hardest part is creating the first draft, because I always feel that it’s so very poor, that my writing life is surely over.

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5. Do you have any advice for listeners who are aspiring writers?

Keep reading and keep writing and never give up. I know that sounds simplistic, but it isn't. Reading feeds our creativity like nothing else, and writing is something you only learn by doing.

6. How do you think the emergence of digital books and e-readers are going to affect you personally?

While I don't see myself as "reading" a book on a machine anytime in the near future, I'm very excited about the possibilities the digital world is creating for books to expand into places they've never gone before and to be read by people who perhaps didn't see themselves as "readers" until now. And for those who are already avid readers, I would think the idea of not having to carry a heavy bag of books to the beach is appealing. I know the business end of the decisions about all of this is very fluid at the moment and things are in a bit of an uproar concerning digital rights and pricing. While those things are concerning for all of us, I think that in the end the digital revolution is going to prove to be a wonderful thing for both writers and readers. We all just have to take a deep breath and figure out how the "convenience" can exist in a world that sustains creativity and retains a business model that allows us all to survive and thrive. I believe that will happen.