



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH KAREN WITEMEYER



To Win Her Heart
by Karen Witemeyer
ISBN: 978-0-7642-0757-0
Trade Paper; \$14.99; 352 pp.
Release Date: May 2011

1. What inspired you to write *To Win Her Heart*?

Have you ever wished there was an epilogue to Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son? I have. When I decided to write *To Win Her Heart*, one question prompted the plot development: What happens after the father welcomes the prodigal son home? So often we focus on the wonderful homecoming the lost son received, but have you ever asked what life was like for him after the celebration was over? How did he relate to his bitter older brother or the servants and townspeople who were only too aware of his past arrogance and wild living? My story plays on those very questions.

2. How did this inspiration lead to the development of your characters?

First, I needed a prodigal. Enter my hero, Levi Grant. Raised by godly parents, he turns his back on his faith and the blacksmithing trade of his father to prove his manhood and earn easy money through the wild life of a bare-knuckle brawler—until the day something goes terribly wrong and he ends up in Huntsville state prison serving a two-year sentence. Through the traumatic abuse he suffers in the labor camps combined with the compassion he receives from the prison chaplain, Levi comes to a place of repentance and rededicates his life to the Lord.

Our heroine, Eden Spencer, fulfills the role of the parable's older brother character. She has been disappointed by men in the past and has little tolerance of those who don't meet her high standards. She cannot abide violence of any kind and believes that elevating young minds through education and exposure to literature will help create a more civilized society. To this purpose, she opens a lending library in her home.

In an effort to make a clean start, Levi hides his past, and Eden believes she has finally found a man of honor and integrity, a man worthy of the love her battered heart so wants to give. But when the truth about his prodigal past comes to light, our tarnished hero must fight to win back the librarian's affections.

3. In your research, did you uncover any historical events or information that helped shape your story?

In researching stone quarries, I ran across a tidbit that played a key role in determining time period and setting for my book. In 1881, the Texas state capitol building was destroyed by fire, and the Texas Legislature decided that when they rebuilt, they would use only materials native to the state. They initially chose limestone, as there was a quarry near Austin, but when iron particles in the rock led to discoloration, they elected red granite instead. The granite was obtained from Granite Mountain in 1885, and to cut costs, the state contracted convict labor for breaking the stone. The use of free—or almost free—convict labor in the quarry, however, was seen as an attempt by the state to undermine union labor and was opposed by virtually every organized labor group in Austin. Hence, word spread throughout the region about the controversial labor force.

(Continued on next page)

Media Contacts

PRINT/ BROADCAST: **Noelle Buss**
952-829-2765
noelle.buss@bethanyhouse.com

INTERNET: **Jim Hart**
952-829-2526
jim.hart@bethanyhouse.com

CANADIAN MEDIA: **Ellen Graf-Martin**
519-342-3703
ellen@grafmartin.com

Please send tear sheets to:
Noelle Buss
11400 Hampshire Ave. S.
Bloomington, MN 55438

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH KAREN WITEMEYER

This historical event allowed me to supply my hero with quarry experience during his incarceration, but with a project that was so well known for using convict labor, that it could easily expose his past should anyone learn of his involvement. I couldn't have asked for a more perfect scenario.

4. Are there elements of your own personality that influenced your characters?

I incorporated my love of fiction into both my main characters. Levi accidentally develops a love of literature when he takes a teacher's advice to expand his vocabulary through reading in order to mask his tendency to lisp. Eden, on the other hand, grows to love books because of her relationship with her father. The two of them would often pass an evening discussing plots, themes, and social ramifications of the books they read. It was a tradition she treasured.

I've loved to read my whole life, and part of the appeal was the pleasure I found in imagining myself to be someone else—someone daring, outspoken, and beautiful—instead of the shy, nerdy girl who would rather eat spinach than talk to someone she didn't know. And like Eden's time with her father, I experienced a similar sharing with my dad, although it was with music instead of books. Dad and I would sit and sing hymns together on the Sunday mornings he was scheduled to lead singing at our church. I loved those mornings. They helped shape who I grew to be. And since I married a man who loves music and leads singing, I followed Eden's pattern by falling in love with a man who can share the same things with me that I shared with my father.

5. What is the take-away message you want readers to receive after reading *To Win Her Heart*?

The underlying theme of this book is one of forgiveness and of learning to view others through God's lens instead of our own. Just as Jesus encouraged the Pharisees to only cast a stone if they were without sin, we must learn to set aside our self-righteous pride in favor of mercy and forgiveness. It is human nature to keep records of wrongs and to view others through our own hurts and prejudices. And while our God is certainly concerned with justice, when one of his children repents, his mercy and forgiveness know no bounds. We must learn to exhibit the same grace to our brothers and sisters in Christ, extending them the mercy we ourselves would wish to receive. After all, love keeps no record of wrongs.

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:8)