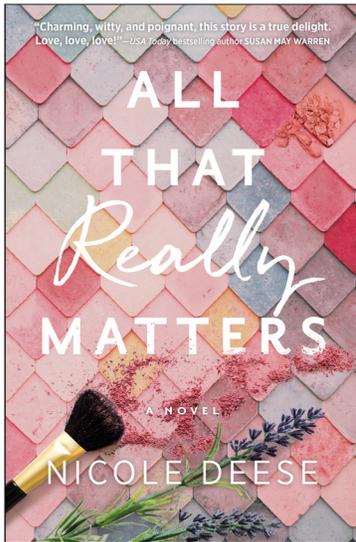




QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH NICOLE DEESE



All That Really Matters

by Nicole Deese

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1. The precarious balance between our online and offline presence is so relevant, especially as Christians. What made you choose this as one of the themes for *All That Really Matters*?

Navigating the online world, and social media, in particular, is an active struggle for pretty much every person I know, myself included. The pressure to grow our personal platforms and widen our virtual sphere of influence while also trying to stay present and connected in the real-life communities God has placed us in is often an area of great frustration and confusion. In *All That Really Matters*, my hope was to show an accurate portrayal of this ever-increasing tension between our online personas and our face-to-face relationships . . . and how God can challenge us in both.

2. What was the inspiration behind *The Bridge*, the fictional faith-based transitional youth home for aged-out foster kids?

The lifeblood behind this story was birthed from a single dinner conversation in early 2019. I'd been invited to serve with some ladies from my home church at a graduation ceremony for a similar type of faith-based, life-skills program for young adults transitioning into independent living. When it was time to sit down and eat, my name card had been mistakenly moved. And little did I know then, but I'd been placed right next to the director of the entire program. As our conversation progressed through the evening, I asked question after question, listening intently as she shared testimonials of growth and triumph, and also stories of heartbreak and despair. By the time I left that night, I knew this was the type of environment I wanted my characters to grow in. I spent the next several weeks making phone calls to experts in this field, reading books and articles on teen trauma, and researching everything I found online.

3. What do you hope readers will take away from this story?

Within the pages of this story, Molly is challenged time and time again to reach out, even when it's hard. Even when it requires her to be known and vulnerable outside the online persona and screens she can so easily hide behind. My hope is that as my readers travel through the pages of this story, they will begin to ask themselves questions similar to the ones she asks of herself: Am I truly known by a safe group of people? Who are the in-person relationships God has placed in my life for the purpose of living and growing in the community? Where might God be asking me to give of my time to better serve my local church or community?

4. What are your favorite things about your main characters: Molly McKenzie and Silas Whittaker?

My favorite things about Molly are her spunk, tenacity, and confidence. Though her day-to-day drama and antics were super fun to create, her growth and maturity as she began to explore the true power of connection led to one of the most satisfying character arcs I've written to date. For Silas, the admirable qualities list runs long. His integrity and passion for justice are what make him stand out as a true hero. I love his ability to be direct and authoritative while also speaking with respect and grace.

5. Which secondary character are you particularly attached to and why?

I really enjoyed writing Val Locklier, Molly's virtual assistant and best friend. Like so many of my real-life friendships, Molly and Val's relationship is layered with history and experience. It's also tested by their current life stresses and fears. Yet even after some fissures begin to show on the surface, their foundation of love and loyalty is what remains. Val's constant selflessness for others is a true inspiration and one of the biggest reasons I've chosen to give her a story of her own! Stay tuned for *All That It Takes*—coming in April 2022.

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