



## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH KAREN WITEMEYER

### 1. What served as the inspiration for *At Love's Command*?

*At Love's Command* was inspired by three television series I watched as a teen and young adult back in the 1980s and 1990s. *The A-Team* inspired my team of four ex-military mercenaries and their determination to help the powerless fight against injustice. I gave them a *Magnificent Seven* spin to add the western flair, and then created a heroine inspired by *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*. Dr. Josephine Burkett was even mistaken for a man called Dr. Jo just like Michaela Quinn was confused as Michael when first hired.

### 2. Your books often feature characters with names that carry meaning beyond face value. Do you have any such characters in this book?

I love selecting names with hidden significance. Sometimes readers catch on to the game I'm playing, other times they never realize my intent. Either way, it's a way for me to infuse a little extra fun into the writing process. *At Love's Command* features several characters/places with meaningful names.

The four Horsemen have names inspired by the four gospel writers. I didn't want to be too predictable, however, so I gave one a twist: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Jonah. Not too much was made of this in the book since they call each other by last names, rank, and nicknames frequently, but as I was developing the characters, this little quirk made me smile.

Two of the villainous outlaws have names to fit their dispositions. The head outlaw's name, Taggart, was chosen not only because it was full of hard consonant sounds to match his harsh nature, but also because he was very cocky and full of himself. Taggart rhymes with . . . braggart. His right-hand man was a bit of a sadist who happened to be very good with knives. Of course, I had to name him Carver.

Then there is the horse farm. The fictional breeding farm I created for Josephine's father was named Gringolet Farms. I wanted his horses to be the finest stock in Texas and in great demand by the US Army for their cavalry units. So I named the farm after Gringolet, Sir Gawain's faithful steed from Arthurian legend. Gringolet was a sturdy charger known for his ability in combat—the perfect name for a breeding operation that catered to the military. The horse that Matthew Hanger selects from Gringolet stock in order to track down the outlaws was named Percival, in keeping with the Gringolet tradition. Percival was one of King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table.

### 3. How did you decide on the setting for your book?

When searching for a setting for this story, I combed my favorite 19th century Texas map for ideas. I love using old maps to help me find towns that might not still be in existence today. I wanted a small town that would be induced to accept a female doctor simply because they couldn't attract a male one due to poor salary offerings and an unattractive location. As I scanned the map, a name jumped out at me. It was so descriptive, I knew I had to use it—Purgatory Springs. It sounded awful, which made it absolutely perfect!



#### ***At Love's Command***

HANGER'S HORSEMAN #1

by Karen Witemeyer

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Purgatory Springs opened a school in 1877 for seventeen students. A post office operated from 1890 to 1895, then changed its name to Hugo in 1896, three years after the conclusion of my story. Poor Hugo declined after the turn of the century, and the post office closed in 1909. Within a few decades, the community was abandoned. All that remains today is a cemetery.

**4. What do you want readers to take away from this book?**

I want readers to enjoy a fun, adventurous story, but deeper than that, my prayer is that God will meet them within the pages. The overarching theme of this story is our need to live fully surrendered to God. Our independent natures want so badly to prove that we are self-sufficient, that we can fix what is broken and achieve our own greatness. Beyond the pride of those thoughts, there is the fear that if we completely surrender to God's will, he will take us someplace we don't want to go. I admit that I struggle with this myself. In fact, as I was writing the scene where Josephine finally lets down her guard with God and becomes brutally honest in her prayer, I found myself admitting the same fears.

*I'm afraid, Lord. Afraid to completely surrender. Afraid that if I have no control over the outcome, it won't end the way I desire.*

And then came God's response to her spirit and to mine: *Lean not unto thine own understanding.*

Our understanding cannot see the full picture. It is limited. Small. Far better to surrender and trust completely the One who sees all and understands all, and who loves with a depth I cannot fathom. My character prayed the prayer of my soul, and the Lord gave me an answer that had far more impact in the real world than the fictional one. My desire is that the Lord will touch readers in the reality of their souls as well.