



**The Legacy**

SECRETS OF THE SHETLANDS #3  
by Michael Phillips

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**QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH MICHAEL PHILLIPS**

**1. This series is set in the Shetland Islands. Do you have a special connection to the Shetlands? Or asking it in a different way, why did you set the story in the Shetlands?**

Ever since I began my work with George MacDonald and writing for Bethany House over thirty years ago, most of my writing has been set in Scotland. But I am continually trying to discover new places in Scotland to explore, new places in which to set stories, different aspects of Scottish history to touch, and new and different spiritual themes to bring in that will impact my characters. I had never set a story in the Shetlands before, and this small collection of islands located remotely in the North Atlantic has always intrigued me since I first visited them many years ago.

My readers have learned over the years that they will not only get much to think about, with characters who grow and learn and change, but also new insights into a place and time in history.

**2. How did the series originate?**

I was sitting looking out the window—in Scotland, incidentally, where we now spend most summers for me to write . . . about Scotland, of course!—and found myself thinking, What if an up-and-coming young career city woman suddenly found herself inheriting a cottage in a small Scottish village, knowing nothing about her Scottish roots? What would she do? What would she think as she walked into the backwater village so far removed from her high-flying corporate life?

**3. Did you envision the entire series at the beginning or did it develop in the writing?**

It definitely developed as I wrote. That’s how it always is for me. I rarely see very far ahead in a story. I don’t outline a book for the simple reason that it’s hopeless even to try. I seldom know what’s coming next, where the plot or characters are going. Many of the characters do not exist until I’m writing away in the flow of the story . . . then suddenly there is a new character on the page. Sometimes one of these new characters that just suddenly appears, about whom I know absolutely nothing, will take over a book. I never know where things are going to lead. I just start writing and wait to see what happens.

**4. How would you summarize the thematic and spiritual focus of THE SECRETS OF THE SHETLANDS?**

I would identify two main thematic strands. The first is the overarching theme I try to bring into all my books: *How do people respond when the Spirit of God calls on their hearts?* I love this eternal question.

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So I try to develop a range of characters in my books, all with unique personalities and struggles and backgrounds—some with no spiritual influences in their lives, others who do have such influences, some who are open to God, others who are hostile, and then I watch how they relate to each other and how they begin to grow spiritually. Then I throw those characters into crises or situations that challenge them personally on many levels and watch how they grow and change and develop as men and women.

Then secondly, the idea of family roots, heritage, and legacies is especially dear to my heart. My wife and I are semi-active genealogists, and both our family trees go back centuries. We treasure our legacies and those who have come before in combining to make us the people we are. So in this series I was intrigued to develop a main character who knew absolutely nothing about her past and heritage—an orphan—embarking on a journey to discover her roots and family connections she never knew she had, and in so doing discover much about herself. I suppose in a way this, too, is Everyman's Story, learning who we are and where we came from. Hence the title of the third book of the series, *The Legacy*.

**5. Are there any final thoughts you would like to leave readers with?**

One of my main objectives when I write, besides telling a good story that I hope will keep people turning the pages, is that readers will find themselves in the story. Obviously the circumstances of life will be different. But hopefully readers will identify with some of the struggles characters in the story face, as well as those issues and mental and emotional challenges the characters have to wrestle with and grow through. When I receive a letter from a reader (or an email or Facebook message these days—though I'm not too good about keeping up with Facebook, I'm afraid!) which says, "I had the feeling you were writing about ME," that's when I know that author and reader have connected in a meaningful way. To those readers I would say, let me know that you and I touch in that way. That's how an author stays relevant.