



Shadow of the Storm

OUT OF EGYPT #2

by Connilyn Cossette

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QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH CONNILYN COSSETTE

1. What can you tell us about your new book, *Shadow of the Storm*?

Shadow of the Storm picks up shortly after the end of *Counted With the Stars*, while the Hebrews are camped at Mount Sinai. Shira, whom readers will remember as Kiya's Hebrew friend, is adjusting to a life of freedom after being enslaved in Egypt. In the midst of the golden bull-calf rebellion, Shira helps a laboring mother give birth and discovers an immediate talent for midwifery. Although her mother is adamantly against it, Shira steps forward to embrace this new calling. But when a delivery goes awry, Shira finds herself tied to a man who betrayed her, left with the responsibility for three little ones, and the target of a bitter woman with dangerous associations. While Shira deals with the repercussions of her choices and struggles through reconciling the pain of her past in Egypt, tensions between the Hebrews, the foreigners, and the tribes are laying the foundation for a volatile situation within the camp. Just as the new nation of Israel is struggling to determine its identity during this first year in freedom, Shira is struggling to embrace her special calling, to stop defining herself by the wounds inflicted upon her, and to see herself for who she truly is and who God is making her to be.

2. What was your favorite thing about writing this book?

Counted With the Stars took place during the exciting events of the Exodus, which provided ample opportunities and plot structures to weave together with my imagination. However, *Shadow of the Storm* takes place during the year at Mount Sinai where, honestly, there wasn't a whole lot going on! After the rebellion of the Golden Calf, Moses was working on writing down God's laws and the people were building the Tabernacle, but other than a few small instances recorded in the Bible, we know very little. At first this was a daunting challenge, but I began to consider what might have been happening within the mass of former slaves, whose tribal designations had been defined by friction since Jacob's twelve sons were alive, as well as with a multitude of foreigners (*gerim*) who left Egypt to follow Moses into the wilderness. Can you imagine the drama such a situation would have created? People who had no idea how to live as free men and women? Ancient prejudices amplified by special blessings and responsibilities? A large number of foreigners whose motives for coming along might be less than pure? A vast horde of people living in close proximity with all their animals? Endless days of not much to do other than get into arguments and each other's business? So although I had no plagues to work with, I was allowed a little more freedom with my plot and was able to dig a little deeper into my characters. Also, writing a small bit from the POV of the villain was an interesting challenge, and one that I ended up enjoying immensely.

3. What is the most interesting bit of historical research you came across while writing *Shadow of the Storm*?

Since Shira is an apprentice midwife, I spent a lot of time researching midwifery. But of course *Shadow of the Storm* takes place in ancient times so many modern practices were nonexistent. And yet, I was so surprised at the level of medical knowledge that the Ancients recorded. A number of different papyri have been found to contain extensive notes on treating and preventing certain gynecological issues. Some are very strange and possibly dangerous and highlight limited knowledge of anatomy, while some are surprisingly effective, such as a pregnancy test involving sprouting barley and emmer wheat seeds, the details of which I will leave up to your imagination. Egyptian women also squatted on specially designed birthing bricks to lift and support their bodies during delivery. Archeologists discovered one of these birthing bricks, or *meshkenet*, with vibrant decorations depicting a birth scene, the cow-headed

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goddess Hathor (who was thought to protect women during childbirth), and various other gods and demons to scare off evil spirits. Hebrew midwives would have certainly brought many of the Egyptian practices with them into the wilderness and may have struggled to leave behind some of the false religious ideas pertaining to safe and healthy child delivery.

4. Which OUT FROM EGYPT character is most similar to your personality: Kiya, Shira, or someone else?

Although there are absolutely pieces of me in Kiya, Shira's character resonates with me for a few reasons. First of all, Shira is a people-pleaser. She wants everyone to get along and will squelch her own opinions to keep the peace, even when sometimes those opinions are strong ones. I've battled my whole life with being a people-pleaser and many times will end up railroaded by those whose personalities are more assertive. But the older I get, both in years and in my faith, I am becoming less concerned with how people see me and more concerned with how God sees me. Although Shira will rarely stand up for herself, she will fight for the people she loves with passion and vigor if she perceives injustice is being perpetrated, just like me. I also resonated with Shira's struggles with bearing her own children. Since I spent my first seven years of marriage desperate to be a mother and unable to have biological children, her hardship is very familiar to me. But just as God built our family by adoption, Shira experiences God's care and extravagant love for her, even if it is in ways she never expected! Oh, and last but not least, Shira loves to sing! Music has always been important to me. I have been singing in front of people since I was old enough to stand on the piano bench at my grandmother's large parties and have played the piano since I was five. Like Shira, the original Composer speaks to my heart through the interplay of beautiful music and meaningful lyrics. I am always amazed by how pieces of me show up in all my characters, even though I never set out with that purpose. And, of course, when I find my own weaknesses on the page I know the Lord is dealing with my heart.

5. What can you tell us about the third book in the OUT FROM EGYPT series?

Wings of the Wind is the final book in the OUT FROM EGYPT series and takes place at the end of the forty years of wilderness wanderings. Alanah is a Canaanite woman whose father and brothers are killed during a conflict with the Hebrews. With nothing left to lose and a heart full of anger, Alanah decides to take her own vengeance on the Hebrews. She dresses as a man and sneaks onto the battlefield, accepting that she will be undoubtedly be killed. But when she is wounded and a merciful Hebrew man comes to her rescue, Alanah must marry him in accordance with Mosaic Law. Although Alanah has difficulty putting aside her Canaanite heritage, the longer she spends with the Hebrews, the more she discovers the stark differences between the brutality of Canaan and this new nation whose foundation is the protective laws of Yahweh. When a horrific revelation separates her from the man she's come to care for and leaves her stranded with a young girl to protect, she will come face to face with the depravity of Canaan and be forced to come to terms with the greatest traumas of her past. Alanah discovers how precious life is to Yahweh and how, even when she was called His enemy, she was being prepared for a unique destiny, one whose impact would be remembered throughout the ages.