



A Worthy Pursuit

by Karen Witemeyer

Trade Paper ISBN: 978-0-7642-1280-2

\$14.99; 352 pp.

Ebook ISBN: 978-1-4412-6941-6

Release Date: June 2015

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QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH KAREN WITEMEYER

1. What inspired this story?

For me, there is usually a single spark that gets a book idea started. For *A Worthy Pursuit*, that spark was the idea of incorporating gifted children—child prodigies, each having a gift in a different field. And the one who doesn't consider himself gifted ends up being the one who saves the day, proving he is, in fact, remarkable.

I also wanted to play with the idea of opposites attracting. So I chose a refined, educated headmistress who doesn't trust men and paired her with a man of action and intrigue who practically walks off the pages of a dime novel. Charlotte has to learn to trust the man who was sent to destroy her in order to protect the children in her care, and Stone must dig deep to unearth the patience it will take to win the heart of the plucky woman he comes to admire.

2. What were your favorite parts to write?

In this story, Lily (the little girl Charlotte is trying to protect) is an avid reader of dime novels, and in several places, she shares the dime-novel stories with the other characters in the book. I had so much fun writing those over-the-top western scenes. It was a blast! In fact, I loved it so much that when I wrote the follow-up novella (*The Husband Maneuver*) that will release as part of a collection in early 2016, I started every chapter with a short scene from a *Dead-Eye Dan* dime novel. So in the end, you actually get two stories in one, the dime novel and the novella. Super fun!

3. Which character in your book turned out to be your favorite?

All right. I admit it. The heroes in my books are always my favorites. I suppose it's because I'm a romance reader first and foremost, so when I write, I create heroes that I, myself, would fall in love with if I was the reader. My philosophy is to write heroines that I wish I could be and write heroes that make me fall in love with them.

So, in *A Worthy Pursuit*, Stone is my favorite. He was orphaned at a young age and forced to toughen up in order to survive. He found a career that suited his skills and became the best in the business. However, he's not a shoot-first-ask-questions-later type of bounty hunter. In fact, he leaves the outlaw-chasing business and hires himself out as a retriever in order to use his brain more than his gun. He's intelligent enough to piece together clues to find things/people nobody else can find. And he's a man of honor. That's why when he finds Charlotte and the kids he's open to hearing her side of the story instead of focusing solely on the paycheck at the end of the job.

He also woos Charlotte with a patience and gentleness that goes completely against his action-oriented nature. There is a scene where he takes her on a walk to watch the sun set, and the triumph he experiences when she finally relaxes enough against him to lay her head on his shoulder always makes me melt. His relentless yet patient pursuit wins not only Charlotte's heart but mine as well.

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4. What are some of the spiritual themes in *A Worthy Pursuit*?

I tend to focus on spiritual themes that I myself struggle with as I strive for a deeper relationship with God in my own life. The overarching spiritual theme in *A Worthy Pursuit* is one that appears to some extent in many of my novels—trust. Learning to surrender control and trusting God to lead. Trusting God to turn tragedies into blessings. Trusting God when you can't see what lies around the next bend instead of succumbing to fear and worry. So many iterations of this single spiritual discipline. It's so hard to master yet so crucial to a joy-filled walk with God.

Charlotte, my heroine, struggles with trust, especially when it comes to men. Betrayed by her father, a past flame, and her employer, she has learned to rely solely on herself and her own judgment. The trouble is, this self-reliance leaks over into her spiritual life as well, to the point that when God tries to lead her in a direction she doesn't want to go, she balks. She must learn to submit to the godly wisdom of Proverbs—to trust in the Lord with *all* her heart, and lean not on *her own* understanding.

5. How did you come up with the names for your main characters?

I always make it a point to use names that fit with my historical timeline and the overall feel of my story. In *A Worthy Pursuit*, I chose the heroine's name after a fan on Facebook suggested I should use her daughter's name—Charlotte. Since Charlotte Brontë is my favorite classic author and the name is a beautiful, historic name that would fit well with my prim headmistress, I did just that.

I had a little more fun with the hero. He is a tough, loner type who has been making his own way in the world since he was a boy orphaned at an early age. Stone just seemed like the right name for him (even though he's gooey on the inside, like all good tough-guy heroes). There is actually a play on his name inside the book, where he is written into a dime novel under a not-very-well-disguised pseudonym—Stone Hammond becomes Hammer Rockwell in his dime-novel debut.