

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH MELISSA JAGEARS



A Bride at Last
by Melissa Jagears
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1. What inspired this story?

This entire series I've looked for inspiration in real-life mail-order-bride histories. I stumbled upon a story from 1881 called "A Happy Ride," from the book *Hearts West: True Stories of Mail-Order Brides on the Frontier*, by Chris Enss. This was a great story of a feisty mail-order bride who sued her groom when he decided to jilt her after the Bachelor's Club of Grass Valley, California, convinced him not to get caught up in the matrimonial noose. The ending of the real-life story (which can be found on Chris Enss' website) is stranger than fiction—you really ought to look it up and give the snippet a read! I even gave the Bachelor's Club of Grass Valley a little cameo in my story. So in *A Bride at Last*, I wanted my characters to hit a big bump after they started on that "happy ride" toward a marriage of convenience. Then I kept writing to find out what they'd do!

2. What was the toughest part of writing this novel?

The character names gave me fits! Silas's last name was something I mentioned in passing in a single sentence in the first book, WAY before I knew he'd become a fleshed-out character in the series. And then I learned that I was a dolt, and the last name I gave him is actually a nickname for someone named Jones . . . (Thanks to my hubby for pointing that out, even if it was AFTER the book went to print.) So I had to decide what to do with his name, and I think I came up with a great reason for it that really fleshed out my hero. And then my heroine came to me named Tess, but Silas and Tess were too many S sounds together, so I asked my Facebook fans to help me change her name by giving them a photograph of what I thought she looked like and a description of how she acted. The suggestion of Kate felt right, and I went with it.

Oh, wait a minute. Strike all that! I had to write this book under deadline with a newborn. That was way tougher than picking character names!

3. *A Bride at Last* deals a lot with addictions. Is there a reason for that?

In *A Bride in Store*, Silas had a subplot with my hero, Will Stanton, that revolved around his alcohol addiction. I didn't want to toss aside Silas's addiction recovery in *A Bride at Last* just to make him into a "nicer" hero.

Even if a recovering addict has God on their side, there is often a lot of struggle and hard work to stay clean for years and years. Though I've not been physically addicted to anything, my husband has dealt with several addictions in his life. Even decades later, my husband has cravings and dreams of being sucked back in. Once in our marriage, he even hid a relapse from me because he didn't think I'd be able to support him since I didn't understand the hold and how he could've failed. I don't understand the hold, not really, but I don't want anyone else to think, like he did, that those who've never found themselves addicted can't sympathize and be supportive.

Media Contacts

FICTION PUBLICIST: **Amy Green**
952-829-2596
agreen@bethanyhouse.com

CANADIAN MEDIA: **Ellen Graf-Martin**
519-342-3703
ellen@grafmartin.com

Please send tear sheets to:
Amy Green
11400 Hampshire Ave. S.
Bloomington, MN 55438

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I made sure I got my husband's help when I wrote the scenes of a recovering addict's anguish. I hope readers who might never have dealt with addictions can feel and sympathize with Silas's struggle in a more emotional way by being "in his head" through fiction than maybe they ever have before.

4. How do you form the spiritual threads in your story?

I often set out with what I want the characters to learn based on their personality and goals, but I have found almost always during writing a book that some nonfiction Christian book I'm reading will have just this little snippet of clarity that I can add into the book. This time Beth Moore in *Believing God* wrote about the Promised Land in a way I'd never seen before. That little bit of insight fit my characters' spiritual journeys, and so I tweaked a conversation a little to fit what I'd learned into their story. *Believing God* is a really good read, so pick it up if you haven't already and see what you learn!