



**Courageous**

VALIANT HEARTS #3

by Dina L. Sleiman

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**QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH DINA L. SLEIMAN**

**1. *Dauntless* was a Robin Hood story and *Chivalrous* was a Lancelot story. Where did your ideas for *Courageous* come from?**

For this third VALIANT HEARTS book, I was inspired by several different crusader legends, including the children’s crusades and the Knights Templar. Of course the crusades presented some tricky subject matter historically, politically, and philosophically, but I was excited to tackle it due to my familiarity with Middle Eastern customs and religions. My husband is from the Middle East, and I’ve taken several extended trips to that part of the world. I’ve even been caught in Lebanon during fighting between the Muslim group, Hezbollah, and the Israeli forces. So I understand the challenges they face in that part of the world. The conflicts in the Middle East are layered and complicated, both historically and today, and I wanted to bring a sense of that to this book. My friendships with Muslims and former Muslims also served as inspiration for this book, and I hope that I fairly represented the many wonderful people in that culture while still accurately demonstrating some of the more problematic facets of their religious foundations.

**2. Do the VALIANT HEARTS stories overlap?**

Originally my idea was to just base each story on a famous medieval legend and set them at various times and places throughout Europe. However, Bethany House asked that I overlap the characters and settings, so I used a minor character from each book as the hero or heroine in the next, and I love the results! The stories are set in England in the early 1200s, but in *Courageous* the characters also travel to the Holy Land.

**3. What inspired the main characters for *Courageous*?**

Rosalind and Randel were both characters in *Chivalrous*. I wanted Rosalind to present a foil to my big, blond, tomboyish Gwendolyn. So she mostly evolved to fit that role. Rosalind offers a more typically feminine point of view and helps to guide Gwendolyn in discovering her own femininity. She’s the most girly of my VALIANT HEARTS heroines so far, and in *Chivalrous* she even loves beautiful clothes, makeup, and fancy hairstyles. On the other hand, she learns to protect herself and to fight for what she wants from Gwendolyn, which helps to drive her through this crusader story.

In *Chivalrous*, Randel offered a backup love interest for Gwendolyn when it looked like everything was falling apart. She thinks of him as a gawky, awkward teenaged boy, until she looks at him with fresh eyes and discovers a man who is kind, considerate, and quite handsome. I would say the inspiration for Randel is all of those awesome guys who get overlooked in high school but end up making the best husbands. Actually, that was the only role I had planned for Randel in the beginning, but then I fell in love with him and decided to make him the hero of book 3.

This book also has an important thirteen-year-old minor character named Sapphira. She’s a little bit fairy child and a little bit Joan of Arc. Sapphira is the inspirational force behind this crusade. I find her fascinating and hope my readers will too.

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**4. Did you face any challenges in writing this book?**

Very early in the creative process, I realized that I wanted my heroine to go on crusade in search of redemption. Next I needed to figure out what she had done that required such a drastic step. The final result was that my heroine, Rosalind of Ipsworth, made a tragic decision to abort an illegitimate child while she was still serving as Gwendolyn's lady's maid in *Chivalrous*, book 2. This made for some challenging subject matter in a series geared toward Christian teens and young women, but I believe that they want to learn about tough, real life issues from people they can trust.

Although this is a historical novel, I saw an opportunity to examine questions young women are facing today concerning purity and their God-given sexuality. This is a subject close to my heart because I grew up in the church and I also have a college-aged daughter. I believe a message has been pushed by some extreme members of the "purity" movement, which says that even having sexual feelings before marriage is somehow sinful. I disagree. As girls turn into young women, they are going to experience emotions and sensations concerning the opposite sex. They shouldn't feel guilt or shame about that, because it could prove unhealthy for them later, in marriage. At the same time, they need to use wisdom and make godly choices surrounding those feelings. In *Chivalrous* Rosalind made some unfortunate choices and needs to learn that God can restore her and that she doesn't have to earn her own redemption. Between Rosalind and the innocent young Sapphira, I hope I'm able to present balanced and healthy views on this issue.

**5. Is there anything else you would like readers to know about this book?**

I would just like to clarify that this "YA" series has always been geared toward older teens through adults, and it does include romance. Some people seem to mistake YA with middle-grade fiction. This series was never intended for elementary-aged children. Some parents might consider it appropriate reading material for pre-teens, but it is best suited to high school students through adults. As I mentioned, I deal with some rather mature subject matter from a Christian perspective. I don't want teens to feel like I'm writing down to them. Instead, I want them to walk away from my books better equipped to face the world from a godly perspective. Perhaps because of this factor, adults as old as sixty have loved the VALIANT HEARTS books as much as teens!