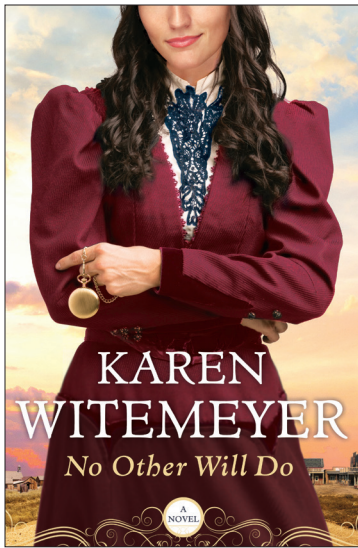




QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH KAREN WITEMEYER



No Other Will Do

by Karen Witemeyer

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1. With nearly a dozen published books and novellas under your belt now, is it challenging to find new story ideas that feel fresh in a genre as popular as historical romance?

Yes, it is very challenging. In fact, I don't think of myself as a naturally creative person. Many authors I talk to have drawers full of ideas that they've filed away for future stories. Me? Well, I deal with one idea at a time. Often my inspiration comes from books I've read or movies I've watched. Something will spark, and I'll just mull it over and ask "what if" until a new idea takes shape. God is the master creator, and without him, I'd be stagnant. I pray over my books every day, knowing that I need His insight and direction as I write every scene.

2. While all your novels have had great dramatic tension and plenty of hair-raising action, No Other Will Do feels different in that it's a more outright, life-threatening, whodunit mystery the hero and heroine have to solve. Is this a one-time story or a larger change of direction with your writing?

I'm always looking for way to create page-turning stories. Sometimes that comes in the form of a villain's attack or a natural disaster, and sometimes it comes through suspense or mystery. I don't believe the overall direction of my books is changing, but I do look for new ways to infuse that tension in every story. The book I'm writing now (another LADIES OF HARPER'S STATION novel) has elements of mystery to it, but not to the same degree as in *No Other Will Do*. The important thing for me is to create a story that readers find impossible to put down. Where the tension originates doesn't matter so much as making sure it exists in whatever form best fits the story and characters.

3. What inspired the story of a women's colony in Texas?

The idea for the women's colony described in *No Other Will Do* came from a 1951 movie called *Westward the Women*. I first saw this movie on television on an old-movie channel when I was in high school. It made such an impact on me, that it still lingered in my mind twenty-plus years later. In the film, a wagon train full of women crossed the country to the Oregon territory to claim husbands. They had a male trail boss, but the rest of the travelers were women. They relied on each other and overcame incredible hardship and trials to make it through. There is one scene where one of the ladies goes into labor in a wagon that has a broken wheel. All the other women surround the wagon and lift it off the ground to make it level in order to ease the birthing. The message was powerful to me—women might not be as physically strong as men, but get enough of them together, and there is nothing they can't accomplish. That is the idea Emma puts into action when she and her aunts start the women's colony of Harper's Station.

In the late 19th century, women had very few rights. They could not vote. Very rarely were they allowed to work outside the home. They were dependent on fathers, brothers, husbands. And if those men were cruel or dead, the women were left with very little recourse. In *No Other Will Do*, Emma Chandler is a strong-minded female with a compassionate heart who has grown tired of seeing women overlooked and abused by a system that caters to men. So she creates a place where women can come for a fresh start.

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

Bethany House Publishers

11400 Hampshire Ave. S. #200

Bloomington, MN 55438

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Women escaping cruelty. Women alone, who have no honest way to support themselves or their children. Women looking for a place to practice a trade normally only acceptable for men. All are welcome as long as they agree to pull their weight in the community with honest labor and willingness to help any sister in need. Following in her late father's footsteps, Emma runs the bank and the town, offering loans and compassion to women in need. But when an outlaw bent on running them out of town threatens the safety of her ladies, she is forced to admit that she might need a man's help after all. And there is only one man she trusts—Malachi Shaw.

4. Will we see more stories about the women of Harper's Station in the future?

Yes, there will be several Harper's Station stories. *No Other Will Do* is the first in the series, followed by a novella, *Worth the Wait*, coming in January. I'm currently working on the next full-length novel titled *Heart on the Line*, and there will be a final novella to finish the series off after that. Each story creates a happy ending for another lady (or two) of the Harper's Station community.

5. How has God used your writing career to challenge and strengthen your faith?

I often tell people that if you want to know what I am struggling with spiritually, examine the characters in my books. My characters always seem to struggle with the same issues I do. Stress, worry, trust, surrender, forgiveness, pride, etc. God is constantly teaching me lessons I need for my own faith journey as he helps me push my characters into a greater place of faith. In *No Other Will Do*, my main character, Emma, is a strong, independent woman who wears the mantle of leadership for an entire town. When trouble comes, the responsibility for their safety weighs heavily on Emma's shoulders, and she staggers under the weight. It is hard for her to share her burden because she doesn't want to cede control, but she must, for she cannot handle the situation on her own. I, too, struggle with letting others help me. I like to be in control, to make sure everything is done to my perfectionistic standards. Learning to ask for help is difficult but necessary. God designed us as communal beings, to lean on each other and carry one another's burdens. But even more than that, he wants us to rely on him, to surrender to his leadership instead of determinedly plodding ahead on our own. This is a lesson I must continue to learn and apply in my life.