

Q&A with
MONA HODGSON
author of The Sinclair Sisters of Cripple Creek Series

What inspired you to write about a mining camp?

In Arizona, I live at the base of Mingus Mountain, home to the most vertical town in the United States—Jerome. More than twenty years ago, when I first visited the Jerome State Historic Park and the Douglas Mansion, I became fascinated with the historic copper mining camp's history and the romantic appeal of the late 1890's. Soon thereafter, I entertained the idea of writing a historical novel set in Jerome during its boom town years in the late 1890s.

In 2008, I sent the first twenty pages of that endeavor to ACFW (American Christian Fiction Writers) as an entry in their Genesis contest for unpublished novelists. Later that year, my writing sample was awarded First Place in the Historical Fiction category at the annual ACFW conference.

Your debut historical series is set in Colorado. How did that come about when you live in Arizona?

March 31, 2009 my agent called and asked if I was sitting down. She'd shown the proposal for my historical novel set in Jerome, a historical copper mining camp in Arizona, to several editors, and had heard back from one who was interested in publishing me.

In an out-of-the-ordinary situation, the editor, the brilliant Shannon Hill Marchese at WaterBrook Press, asked if I'd be willing to adapt my story premise and move it to Cripple Creek, Colorado. Still set in the late 1890's. Still taking place in a mining camp, but gold instead of copper. Obviously, I said yes. And as they say, the rest is history. In the form of historical fiction.

When Shannon suggested a series that included four sisters coming west, she didn't know, and neither did my agent, that I was one of four sisters. I leapt at the chance to write that story, incorporating a few of the characters and plot points from the Jerome novel. Dr. Morgan Cutshaw, Lewis P. Whibley, and a devastating fire all found their way into *Two Brides Too Many*, Book One in **The Sinclair Sisters of Cripple Creek Series**. It was followed by *Too Rich for a Bride*, *The Bride Wore Blue*, and *Twice a Bride*. And . . . we have another series in the works!

How much time does it take to research your stories? What balance would you say there is between research and actual writing?

Each character, setting, and profession bring with them varying levels of need, from mail-order brides to real-life fires, women in business, asylums, consumption sanatoriums, the mining stock exchange, ice houses, brothels, lawmen and outlaws, portrait painting, photography, and



stammering. Some require more digging than others, depending upon the role in the story. I do know that I have to put a cap on research, or I'd become so intrigued with discovery and not get any writing done.

Your Sinclair Sisters novels all feature the relationships between the sisters. What compels you to write about sister relationships?

Like Ida Sinclair in *Too Rich for a Bride*, I have three younger sisters. Sister relationships are rollercoaster rides, walks in Colorado on a summer day, lines in the shared bedroom that you don't cross, and giggles over a heated checkers game. Those family ties can be both comforting and exasperating, concurrently. That makes the sister-bond especially engaging and entertaining.

You write about both fictional and true life women from the 1890s in The Sinclair Sisters of Cripple Creek stories. As you did research for the series, what did you learn about the strength and resiliency of pioneer women?

In my research, I've discovered that even though their circumstances varied greatly from yours and mine and required extra doses of pluck, those fascinating women of the 1800s were not dissimilar than you and I. They loved and lost. They laughed and cried. They tried and failed. Many tried again and were victorious. Relationships and community mattered to them. Faith played an important role in their strength and resiliency.

Will you write more stories set in Cripple Creek?

My next series starts out in Saint Charles, Missouri in 1865, post Civil War. But I do have ideas for stories that would take us back to Cripple Creek with some of the beloved secondary characters.

Will you write more children's books?

I hope so. I have ideas for many more picture books and beginning readers. I'd also love to write historical novels for ages 8 to 12.

How did you get started in your writing career?

For as long as I can remember, I was going to be a nurse like my cousin Irene. That's what I told my parents and that's what we all expected. Although I had been more successful in English classes than in other classes and I had always preferred words over numbers or science projects, becoming a writer had never crossed my mind. Until I was nearly thirty years old. Read the whole story at [HOW I BECAME A WRITER](#).

Some writers love plotting, some like writing that first draft, and others enjoying researching or digging into the revisions. What's your favorite part about writing a book?



Each phase has its appeal—entertaining a fresh idea, hanging twists and turns on a premise, researching for setting and plot, getting to know the characters through interactions, revisions as I do my first read-through . . . but I think my favorite part is digging into the story after I’ve received the First Round Edits from my editor. The *ah ha moments* that take place in me as I see it all come together is thrilling—like stepping into the homestretch in a marathon.

Do you have Readers’ Guides available for Book Clubs and Reading Groups?

Yes. Is your Book Club or Reading Group planning to read my historical novels or novellas (starting in February 2013)? I have discussion questions available on my website on the Mona’s Books page for *Two Brides Too Many*, *Too Rich for a Bride*, *The Bride Wore Blue*, and *Twice a Bride*. The discussion questions are also available in the back of *Too Rich for a Bride*, *The Bride Wore Blue*, and *Twice a Bride*. Also, I’d be happy to visit with your book club for a pre-scheduled 15-20 minute conversation via Skype. And I have goodies I’d like to send to the group. Email me with a potential date or dates for the call and I’ll check my schedule. If my schedule doesn’t work with yours, I’ll still send enough autographed bookplates and bookmarks for your group.

Do you have any advice for aspiring writers?

Recognize and remember that writing for publication is a process and a journey. Expect detours. Enjoy the adventure! Make the most of writers’ conferences, writers’ market guides, and critiques by published writers.

Do I need a literary agent?

If you wish to publish books for children or adults with a traditional publisher, rather than self-publish, yes, you will most likely need a literary agent to gain access to an acquisitions editor. However, many writers’ conferences do afford writers the opportunity to discuss their project or show their writing to an editor without the initial involvement of an agent.

How do I find an agent?

The best place to meet agents and to get to know them and their philosophy, even their reputation, is at a writers’ conference. You want to find the right agent—the one who is the best match for your genre and writing passion and style, knows the industry, and has the right contacts for your projects.

You’re also a speaker. Who is your favorite audience, what is your favorite venue, and your favorite topic?

Yes, I do enjoy public speaking. I actually enjoy a variety of audiences and venues—from school students, educators, and librarians to writers, and from book clubs to women’s groups. Speaking at women’s retreats is a favorite speaking engagement of mine. Usually three or four talks spread over a weekend, a women’s retreat affords me more time with my audience and allows me to go deeper in discussions about our faith walk. Right now, my favorite retreat topic is **The Quilted Heart**.



The Quilted Heart is a Transformed Heart. God is in the business of transforming hearts. Quilters are transformers. Our lives consist of various remnants from everyday life. What are you doing or what have you done with the scraps/pieces you've been given? Have you cast them aside, pushed them down, tried to keep them hidden, or are you trusting God to sew them in for your good and His glory?

Using the metaphor of quilting—the top, the batting, the backing, the thread, I offer a fun and poignant examination of a Christ-centered faith; of God's Pattern and Provision for quilting our hearts together and reaching out to others.

Want to know something super fun? *Dandelions on the Wind*, *Bending Toward the Sun*, and *Ripples Along the Shore* (Spring 2013) are three novellas in ***The Quilted Heart***, inspired by my retreat series.