

Q&A with
CINDY WOODSMALL
author of the *Sisters of the Quilt* series

Why do you think people are interested in stories of the Amish?

I think part of the interest is the paradox of a historical way of life existing in the middle of our ever-increasing technological age. The Old Order Amish refuse to change and many of us want to know the why and how. We'd like to understand what parts to their traditions and beliefs make them successful in life and what parts don't.

Modern America is so busy traveling constantly by cars, commuter trains, and airplanes. We use cell phones, e-mails, and text messaging to even keep up with our personal lives. In one way or another, I think we all long for life to be more simple and for the value of our family to either be placed above or remain above the busyness which we so often find ourselves in. When we see a photo of the Amish (or perhaps see them) and they appear very picturesque, so we can't help but wonder what their life is truly like beyond the snapshot image.

Why did you choose to write contemporary stories instead of historical ones?

The temptations and challenges thrown at us a hundred different ways every day are contemporary, so I love to fashion characters who face those things. For my own life, I'm always looking for insights for living, the kind that enters into our hearts and bolt us to the ways of Christ. The ones that help us navigate through murky waters into successful living—and success in Him. To me, that kind of refreshment and encouragement is found through a contemporary setting.

Tell us about how you research these books.

Most of my research for these books is done while I'm staying in an Old Order Amish home. There's no other form of research that can match living the lifestyle for a few weeks while peppering my friends with questions and doing interviews with the Old Order Amish men, women, and teens within the community. While there, I can go to the businesses of many Old Order Amish men and women to get hands-on experience of how they do their trade. A few weeks ago, I had the blessing of being there during a special community event, and that was more valuable than anything I've ever found in a research book.

How do you think your protagonist Hannah is different than most Amish girls her age?

Most young Amish women believe the conservative ways they've been taught. Accepting the narrow role of who they can and can't be as women, they settle into a lifestyle that honors God, family, and community.

Hannah desperately wants to do what's right before God. Her moral compass stays true, but her heart defies her—refusing to let her yield to her family's and community's beliefs of what she must do to be a godly young woman. But even as she struggles against the molds of the Old Order Amish, she runs headlong against herself time and again—making her wonder if everyone else is right and she is wrong. Yet . . . she can't break free of a heart that dares to question the Old Ways as well as herself.

I've heard you grew up with a Mennonite friend—did that help you understand the Amish community?

My friend was of the sect of the Amish Mennonites, so her ties to the Old Order Amish were fairly close. While offering some unique insights, our friendship changed me. When I spent the night with her, the contrast in our homes astounded me. Their daily goal of peaceful family time and order over a quick meal and an evening of entertainment struck a chord in me that hasn't stopped chiming yet. And just the fact that neither sets of parents approved of our relationship opened my understanding of cultural and religious differences inside "white, Christian" America.

What do readers typically say when they write to you?

The number one response is "Thank you!" and "Write Faster!" I receive a lot of notes offering to clean my home or do whatever I need if I'll write more than one book per year. But mostly readers want a list of all I've written or all I'm contracted to write and they say something to the effect of: it's such a blessing to read your books. They have such depth of character and meaning, and yet they're so clean my teenaged daughter can pick it up and read it. I've received a version of this on numerous occasions: "I'm Amish, and I was pleasantly surprised to find your books quite accurate and very well done."

What are you working on now?

I'm so excited about the book I'm now writing. It's *Hope of Refuge*. It has two storylines, both of which are based on true stories and issues that have faced the Old Order Amish community.

Orphaned as a child, Cara makes her way to a past she doesn't remember. What does a quaint Amish community have in common with the penniless streets of New York City? Join Cara as she faces both.

Mahlon is a baptized member of the faith who witnessed firsthand the destruction of the Twin Towers. It haunts him and when he feels called to serve his country, he ignores it as lunacy and asks his girl to marry him. Will he yield to the call and lose everything or can he find answers that don't seem to exist?