



Hello, CLJ Readers:

I am the CLJ editor and am assisting Nancy while she recuperates from back surgery. The reviews in this newsletter are also posted on the CLJ blog. If you are not receiving the blog entries, please visit <http://www.christianlibraryj.org/blog/> to subscribe. By subscribing to the CLJ blog, you will receive a review every few days, most of the time in advance of its appearance in the newsletter.

This issue covers great fiction and non-fiction titles for readers of all ages. We hope you enjoy reading this newsletter, and pray that you will be greatly blessed as you seek out good reading material for you and your family.

In Him,
Angela Walsh

Books for Young Children

Allegra, Mike

Sarah Gives Thanks / by Mike Allegra; illustrated by David Gardner.

Albert Whitman & Company ISBN 978-0-8075-7239-9

PRI Grades 2-5 (all ages) Rating: 4

Widowed with five children, Sarah Josepha Hale still thanks God for all she has as she searches for a way to support her family in 19th century New England. Despite the lack of education available to women at the time, Sarah hones her skills as a writer and becomes a successful author and “editress” of two ladies’ magazines, introducing her readers to “unladylike” topics such as science and exercise. She often writes and reflects on the need to be thankful for our blessings. *Sarah Gives Thanks* recounts Sarah’s determination to have Thanksgiving declared a national holiday. For 36 years she petitions officials and four American presidents before the holiday is proclaimed in 1863.

The influential and ambitious Sarah Josepha Hale is well presented by author Mike Allegra in this picture book biography. Young readers will meet a woman who is resourceful, hopeful, and above all, thankful, through difficult times in her life. David Gardner’s lively watercolor illustrations and inviting cover art marvelously present the characters and even manage to capture the appearance of being painted on textured paper. The transition of the story from the just-widowed Sarah to a recollection of her childhood and marriage and then forward to her later work elevates the reading level of the book. *Sarah Gives Thanks* would be an excellent addition to a class or school library and timely for Thanksgiving or Women’s History Month. End pages include a list of selected sources and an author’s note with additional information on Sarah Josepha Hale.

Nina Ditmar, CLJ

Bergren, Lisa Tawn

God Gave Us Easter / by Lisa Tawn Bergren; illustrated by Laura J. Bryant.

God Gave Us Easter / by Lisa Tawn Bergren; illustrated by Laura J. Bryant.

Waterbrook Press ISBN 978-0-307-73072-5

PRI Preschool Rating: 3

Papa Bear explains to Little Cub and her siblings that Easter is God's gift and part of His plan for us to be with Him forever. As they hike through the snowy woods, Papa Bear uses the nature around them—a fallen tree, a river, and a rainbow—to teach Little Cub about God's love and forgiveness. Little Cub learns how to "listen with her heart" for God's message.

God Gave Us Easter is part of Lisa Tawn Bergren's "*God Gave Us...*" series. Preschoolers will enjoy the sweet polar bear characters in this simple story about why we celebrate Easter, and the colorful illustrations by Laura J. Bryant are delightful. There are many loving examples of a parent and child sharing their thoughts on God and prayer. However, the resurrection story may be too vaguely told for young children to understand, and extra details about the root of Jesse and Noah's Ark seem out of place. There are references to Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny, as Papa Bear teaches his children to focus on God.

Nina Ditmar, CLJ

Blankenbaker, Frances

What the Bible Is All About Bible Handbook for Kids: Based on the Best-Selling Classic by Dr. Henrietta Mears / author and general editor, Frances Blankenbaker.

Gospel Light ISBN 978-0-8307-5943-9

INT Grades 2-6 (all ages) Rating: 5+

What the Bible is All About Bible Handbook for Kids is a guide for young readers that presents an overview of the Old and New Testaments through drawings, maps, outlines, and timelines. The book is based on the adult version written by Dr. Henrietta Mears.

Designed for children, this sizeable (350+ pages) paperback is so well organized and thorough that it will undoubtedly appeal to readers of all ages. An introductory section explains what the Bible is, its division into the Old and New Testaments, and a message about becoming part of God's family. Each book of the Bible is then presented in summary form, with accompanying information such as author, location, characters, and that book's connection to Jesus. "Discoveries from the Past" sections provide archaeological context and there is an extensive glossary. When included, Scripture quotations are from the *NIV*. Numerous clip-art style figures, maps, and charts illustrate the pages and contribute to the youthful appeal of this fun and absorbing book. Useful as an introduction to the Bible, a companion to Bible study, or a reference tool, this handy handbook would be a wonderful gift for a child and a superb addition to the family bookshelf.

Nina Ditmar, CLJ

Ernst, Kathleen

Meet Caroline/ by Kathleen Ernst; illustrated by Robert and Lisa Papp. (The Caroline series, 1)

American Girl Publishing ISBN 978-1-59369-882-9

INT Ages 8 and up (all ages) Rating: 5+

Caroline's Secret Message/ by Kathleen Ernst; illustrated by Robert and Lisa Papp. (The Caroline series, 2)

American Girl Publishing ISBN 978-1-59369-884-3

INT Ages 8 and up (all ages) Rating: 5+

A Surprise for Caroline/ by Kathleen Ernst; illustrated by Robert and Lisa Papp. (The Caroline series, 3)

American Girl Publishing ISBN 978-1-59369-886-7

INT Ages 8 and up (all ages) Rating: 5+

Caroline Takes a Chance/ by Kathleen Ernst; illustrated by Robert and Lisa Papp. (The Caroline series, 4)

American Girl Publishing ISBN 978-1-59369-888-1

INT Ages 8 and up (all ages) Rating: 5+

Caroline's Battle/ by Kathleen Ernst; illustrated by Robert and Lisa Papp. (The Caroline series, 5)

American Girl Publishing ISBN 978-1-59369-890-4

INT Ages 8 and up (all ages) Rating: 5+

Challenges for Caroline/ by Kathleen Ernst; illustrated by Robert and Lisa Papp. (The Caroline series, 6)

American Girl Publishing ISBN 978-1-59369-892-8

INT Ages 8 and up (all ages) Rating: 5+

Caroline Abbott is living with her parents and grandmother in peaceful Sackets Harbor, New York, where Papa runs a shipyard. The War of 1812 thrusts the entire Abbott family into dangers and new challenges that are explored in this six-book American Girl series by Kathleen Ernst.

Meet Caroline introduces nine-year-old Caroline Abbott and her family. Caroline adores her father and is eager to captain her own small boat one day. Alas, Papa feels she is a bit too “flighty” for such responsibility. Then all of Caroline’s dreams are put on hold when Papa is captured by British soldiers.

In *Caroline's Secret Message*, Mama must get a warning to Papa, imprisoned by the British on the other side of Lake Ontario. Their daring plan will require Caroline’s courage and resourcefulness. The war brings an army officer’s family to board with the Abbotts, and Caroline must find a way to accept and befriend the more mature and sophisticated Rhonda Hathaway.

A Surprise for Caroline brings Caroline’s cousin Lydia to spend the winter. Initially excited to have the company of both Lydia and Rhonda, Caroline quickly feels excluded when the older girls develop other interests. When her recklessness endangers all three girls, Caroline realizes she must examine her feelings and mend her friendships.

Caroline Takes a Chance places Caroline and her friends in the path of a British warship. Faced with a difficult choice, Caroline must act fast and decisively or an important American supply boat will be seized. Frightened and hurt, she longs to feel her father’s presence by going to their favorite fishing camp, where a great surprise awaits.

In *Caroline's Battle*, Papa’s homecoming is cut short when he leaves to help defend Sackets Harbor. It is up to Caroline, Mama, and Grandmother to keep Abbott’s Shipyard running and out of British hands even if difficult and drastic measures must be taken.

Changes for Caroline finds Caroline reluctantly leaving Sackets Harbor to help her Uncle Aaron and cousin Lydia run their farm, where she is faced with many new responsibilities and a daunting mystery.

Caroline is rewarded with a marvelous surprise when she is reunited with her family for an Independence Day celebration.

Caroline is spirited and impulsive, but she is also brave, confident, patriotic, and obedient. The war tests Caroline to be “steady” and brings out the best in this young girl’s character. The books in this series are suspenseful and uplifting, with strong role models and wonderful historical detail throughout. Robert Papp’s full-page illustrations resemble fine art prints and are so beautiful that readers will be compelled to keep looking forward and back at them while reading! Small vignettes by Lisa Papp delightfully animate the text and enliven the pages. A “Looking Back” feature at the end of each volume offers additional information, including maps and period artwork, about early America and the war. This series is highly recommended for ages 8 and above, and would be an excellent family or classroom read-aloud.

Nina Ditmar, CLJ

Ernst, Kathleen

Traitor in the Shipyard / by Kathleen Ernst. (American Girl Mysteries)

American Girl Publishing ISBN 978-1-60958-084-1

INT Ages 9 and above Rating: 5+

Traitor in the Shipyard by Kathleen Ernst is an American Girl Mystery involving Caroline Abbott, a 10-year-old girl living with her family in Sackets Harbor, New York, a year into the War of 1812.

Caroline’s father runs a shipyard and has been busy building gunboats for the American navy when a mysterious act of vandalism and rumors of espionage threaten their work and the security of Sackets Harbor. The adventurous Caroline is loyal to her country and family, compassionate, honest, and trustworthy; all of these qualities come together in the story as Caroline seeks the truth under difficult and confusing circumstances.

While *Traitor in the Shipyard* could easily stand alone as a compelling mystery story, it is probably best enjoyed as a follow-up to the six-volume American Girl “Caroline” series. As a longer chapter book written on a slightly higher reading level, *Traitor in the Shipyard* is an excellent and welcome progression to the historical fiction series. Endnotes include a “Looking Back” feature with period artwork and details about the actual town of Sackets Harbor and events of the war.

Nina Ditmar, CLJ

Horáček, Petr

Puffin Peter / written and illustrated by Petr Horáček.

Candlewick Press ISBN 978-0-7636-6572-2

PRI Ages 2-5 Rating: 5

Peter and Paul are carefree puffins living on a small rocky island until a big storm blows them out to sea. Peter asks a large blue whale to help find Paul, and discovers that the best way to describe his friend is not quite as obvious as he thinks!

Sandwiched between the bright shiny cover art and the big smiling whale on the final page of *Puffin Peter* are a wealth of enchanting images and tender dialogue in this sweet picture book about a little puffin searching for his friend. Author/illustrator Petr Horáček’s delightful mixed media illustrations are filled with expression, and his use of descriptive words is sure to make this a preschool favorite. The amusing conclusion is a portrait of friendship and patience, and a reminder that sometimes the simplest explanations are just right.

Nina Ditmar, CLJ

Ingram, Jason

I Couldn't Love You More / by Jason Ingram and Matt Hammitt; illustrated by Polona Lovšin.

Tyndale House ISBN 9781414367392

PRI Preschool (all ages) Rating: 5

I Couldn't Love You More conveys the absolute and unbounded love and protection that God has for us.

This graceful picture book brilliantly captures the simple truth of God's constant presence and never-ending care. Polona Lovšin's delightful full-page illustrations feature adorable animals in seasonal splendor, demonstrating the many ways we care for each other and the certainty that Jesus loves us even more. This gentle book is perfect for sharing with young children, but the comforting reminder of God's deep love will uplift readers of any age.

The concise and elegant lyrics by Christian musicians Jason Ingram and Matt Hammitt were originally released as a song on Matt Hammitt's album *Every Falling Tear* after Hammitt's son was born with a heart defect. Photographs and expanded biographical information about the authors and artist are worthy of note. Proceeds from this book help support the family's Whole Hearts Foundation.

Nina Ditmar, CLJ

Leathers, Philippa

The Black Rabbit / written & illustrated by Philippa Leathers.

Candlewick Press ISBN 978-0-7636-5714-7

PRI Preschool-Grade 2 Rating: 4

Try as he might, Rabbit just can't get away from the large Black Rabbit that appears one sunny day. He tries running, hiding, and swimming, but Black Rabbit follows his every move. He thinks he is finally safe only to find that more trouble awaits in "the deep, dark wood." An unlikely ally comes to Rabbit's rescue, for in *The Black Rabbit*, things are not always what they seem!

This quick tale by author/illustrator Philippa Leathers may seem a bit scary to young children hearing it for the first time, but they will giggle with anticipation when an obliging adult reads it "one more time". This is a fun book for sharing aloud and helping children talk about their fears. There are still a few surprise elements even for preschoolers who realize right away that the Black Rabbit is merely Rabbit's shadow. The soft hues of the watercolor illustrations feel just right for the play of sunlight and shadows, and the cartoon-like Rabbit, with his wistful expression, is simply precious!

Nina Ditmar, CLJ

Rinker, Sherri Duskey

Steam Train, Dream Train / by Sherri Duskey Rinker ; illustrated by Tom Lichtenheld.

Chronicle Books ISBN 9781452109206

PRI PS-Grade 1 Rating: 5

Steam Train, Dream Train appears out of the darkness and pulls into the station at Night Falls. The animal crew playfully and efficiently loads all the cars with toys and treats before turning in for a good night's sleep on the train, which continues its journey through the peaceful night toward another day. In this bedtime fantasy, written with her own energetic children in mind, author Sherri Duskey Rinker both piques imagination and provides education. The crew includes monkeys, camels, giraffes, kangaroos, dinosaurs, polar bears, and penguins, among other animals. They bounce and pounce and have fun as they load each properly-identified train car with appropriate freight before tucking in themselves. Excitement builds on the first pages ("A whistle blares out in the night: a mighty engine--wondrous sight!"). Then, after all the work is done, the rhymes on the final pages are quiet and lulling

("A hiss, a jolt, a shift and sway, now the journey's underway. The train's departing, car by car. The headlight fades into the stars.")

Illustrator Tom Lichtenheld perfectly captures the evening with his wax oil pastel drawings. Throughout the book run a peaceful landscape and an all-encompassing starry sky, which leave youngsters feeling all is well in a dream world where rabbits bounce on pogo sticks and pink elephants spray paint with their trunks.

Valorie Cooper, CLJ

Spinelli, Eileen

Nora's Ark / by Eileen Spinelli; illustrated by Nora Hilb.

Zonderkidz ISBN 978-0310720065

PRI Preschool-Grade 2 Rating: 4

In Eileen Spinelli's *Nora's Ark* young Nora responds to a rainy weather forecast by deciding to build an ark in her backyard "just like Noah." Appropriately, in the first illustration Nora is shown constructing an ark of Biblical proportions. But then we read "Well...not *just* like Noah," and in the next illustration we see that Nora's ark is actually made from a broken chair, some boxes and old fence slats. This refrain is repeated at each stage of the story as Nora reimagines Noah's tale. Alternating double-page spreads contrast Nora's imaginary ark with her reality.

While Nora's ark lacks the grandeur of Noah's vessel, this delightful tale is a celebration of the power of a child's imagination to transform how she sees her circumstances. The conclusion is both fitting and satisfying. When Nora sees a rainbow, her heart sings "just like Noah's." This picture book is highly recommended for school and public library collections and will undoubtedly become a storytime favorite.

Peggy Morgan, CLJ

Spinelli, Eileen

When No One Is Watching / by Eileen Spinelli; illustrated by David A. Johnson.

Eerdmans Books for Young Readers ISBN 978-0802853035

PRI Preschool-Grade 2 Rating: 3

In *When No One Is Watching*, author Eileen Spinelli introduces the reader to a young girl who struggles with being shy. When no one is watching, she dances, she cheers, she stomps, and she sings. But when she is not alone, she becomes as inconspicuous as she possibly can. Fortunately, her best friend is also shy, and when the girls are together, they "don't care who's watching at all." The unnamed protagonist is endearingly portrayed with a mop of unruly curls and pink high tops that are constantly untied.

Shy children should easily be able to identify with the story's heroine and can take comfort that they, too, will be able to more fully express themselves one day as this young girl will no doubt do. The muted illustrations are water-colored pen-and-ink drawings set against a pale, grainy background.

Unfortunately, their somber hue tends to cast a pall over the entire book, robbing the title and its plucky protagonist of much of their impact and earning this title a weaker recommendation. However, schools and libraries desiring picture books on the topic of shyness would certainly welcome this title.

Peggy Morgan, CLJ

Books for Middle Schoolers

Wilson, Diane Lee

Tracks / by Diane Lee Wilson.

Margaret K. McElderry Books ISBN 1442420138

MS Grades 6-8 Rating 4

Tracks by Diane Lee Wilson tells the story of a young Irish boy, Malachy Gormley, who sets out to find a job working on the railroad. It's 1866, and his father was killed in the war. Only 13 years old, Malachy takes on the responsibility of supporting his family. He finds a job where his main task is to lead the horse, Blind Thomas, in hauling rock from the Chinamen's digging. A young Chinese boy called "Ducks" tries to befriend Malachy. Malachy is reluctant to reciprocate due to his prejudice against the Chinese. During this time, there is a lot of prejudice against the Chinese immigrants, and the Chinese are not treated equally. Malachy is used to prejudice; he is treated differently by some because he is Irish. However, this doesn't stop him from joining in the ridiculing and mistreatment of the Chinese.

Malachy feels guilty each time he receives letters from his mom about needing money. His guilt leads him to gamble and lose money, and ultimately to make a hasty decision that weighs heavily on his conscience and ends his career with the railroad. He spends the rest of the story making excuses for his misdeed and trying to convince himself that he will be forgiven.

This book is told from Malachy's point of view during his time working on the railroad. He encounters different types of people and conditions—things he's not used to. The story is somewhat depressing in its depiction of harsh economic realities and the prejudices of the time. However, there is a positive note as Malachy does try to redeem himself and exhibits growth in his relationship with Ducks. Even though this is a work of fiction, many of the people and events portrayed are historically accurate. There is also some depiction of opiate drug use by the Chinese men in the story.

Trina Chase, CLJ

Books for High Schoolers

Carr, Patrick W.

The Hero's Lot / by Patrick W. Carr. (The Staff and the Sword, 2)

Bethany House ISBN 9780764210440

HS Grades 8-12 Rating: 5

Patrick Carr follows his debut novel, *A Cast of Stones*, with another engaging fantasy in the Staff and the Sword series. In *A Cast of Stones*, Errol and Liam were deemed vital to the kingdom's future, but no one knew what role they would play when the king died. Errol thinks his troubles are over when the corrupt church leader, Sarin, flees the kingdom, but Errol still has dangerous enemies to face.

Now in *The Hero's Lot*, with enemies attacking Errol more frequently than Liam, Martin and Luis are sent to Errol's home village to discover what makes Errol so important to the kingdom. When Errol is falsely accused of working with spirits, his punishment is to find Sarin in the kingdom of Merakh and kill him or to die trying. *The Hero's Lot* follows both storylines until they intersect. Some answers are discovered, while others are asked. In some ways, Martin's journey is more interesting than Errol's mission, but both are vital to the story.

Carr's sequel is filled with strong characters, a tightly-woven plot, and lots of suspense. Unlike many trilogies where the middle book leaves more questions than answers, *The Hero's Lot* answers those questions and yet asks more. It is an edge-of-your-seat epic adventure, with further development in the

main characters as the series progresses. As in the earlier book, there is violence but it is not graphic, and there is a romantic development for Errol.

The last book of the series, *A Draw of Kings*, is expected in 2014. If the first two books are any indication, it will be welcomed by readers who have come to expect a well-written fantasy by Carr.

Highly recommended for teen collections in public libraries and school libraries.

Carol R. Gehringer, Worthy2Read.wordpress.com

Larson, R. J.

Prophet / by R. J. Larson. (Tales of the Infinite, 1)

Bethany House ISBN 9780764209710

HS Grades 8-12 Rating: 5

Author R. J. Larson takes her writing into a new direction: fantasy inspired by Old Testament books with a medieval flavor. The series will delight adult and young adult fantasy fans alike.

In *Prophet*, seventeen year old Ela Roeh of Parne hears the call to be the Infinite's prophet, despite the fact that no prophet has ever been a girl. Ela journeys to Istgard with her sister and her destroyer, a horse so bound to her for life that he knows when she is in danger. Ela meets Kien, former ambassador from the Tracelands, and they form an unlikely alliance when they are prisoners. He accompanies her when she is sent to bring the Infinite's word to a warring nation. Eventually Kien comes to believe in the Infinite after seeing His work through Ela. He turns down the Istgard's throne when it is offered, and against his wishes, Akabe, a nomad, is called to be the king of Siphra.

Larson creates a believable world inspired by the Old Testament. The narration is rich and the characters are well-developed. The plot is suspenseful, drawing the reader in as Ela grows as the Infinite's prophet. Her relationship with the Infinite parallels the close relationship many readers long for with God. It is not an easy life, for "a silver-haired prophet is a failure," yet Ela follows when the Infinite leads. She receives agonizing prophetic visions, and speaking the truth has its price. Repeatedly she is physically attacked by enemies, but not killed. Even as she and Kien start to fall in love, she knows that her call as prophet takes priority over any possible future with him.

Discussion questions and an excerpt from *Judge*, the next book in this series, are included.

Recommended for public libraries as well as school libraries.

Carol R. Gehringer, Worthy2Read.wordpress.com

Larson, R. J.

Judge / by R. J. Larson. (Tales of the Infinite, 2)

HS Grades 8-12 Rating: 5

R. J. Larson returns with the second in her young adult fantasy series inspired by the Old Testament.

Judge is the story of Kien, the former Tracelands ambassador, is now a military-judge for the Tracelands, and Ela is in the Tracelands teaching others about the Infinite.

In *Judge*, Kien comes home on his first military leave and receives word from the Infinite to speak a warning to the faithful in ToronSea. His experience is similar to the biblical prophet, Jonah (both do not follow the Infinite's orders completely and must face consequences). His obedience is in conflict with his military's orders, causing legal problems.

Meanwhile, Ela heeds a call to return to Parne where the people have turned away from the Infinite to worship the goddess Atea. Ela discovers a prophet is not welcome in her home country, and Parne has become the Sodom and Gomorrah of its time. Will they heed the message to repent or be destroyed before Ela's eyes? Will Ela escape death when others persecute her?

Though Kien and Ela are separated, their feelings for each other grow. As servants of the Infinite, they follow him before their own desires. Now king of Siphra, Akabe follows the Infinite's orders to destroy Parne because of its wickedness. Ela's family and other believers flee to Siphra as refugees.

Inspired by the Old Testament, Larson creates a believable world with well-developed characters in *Judge*. Biblical parallels are clearly evident and bring a refreshing view to Old Testament stories. A character list, a map and discussion questions, as well as an excerpt from *King*, the next book, are included.

Recommended for public libraries as well as school libraries.

Carol R. Gehringer, Worthy2Read.wordpress.com

Larson, R. J.

King / by R. J. Larson. (Tales of the Infinite, 3)

Bethany House ISBN 9780

HS Grades 8-12 Rating: 5

R. J. Larson returns with the final book in her young adult fantasy series inspired by the Old Testament. *King* is the story of Akabe, reluctant king of Siphra, who undertakes his dream: to rebuild the Infinite's temple, but is it the will of the Infinite?

In *King*, Akabe escapes a poisoning attempt due to the Infinite's intervention. Counseled by his advisors to marry and produce an heir, he proposes to Ela and is rejected. Akabe pursues his dream of rebuilding the temple without consulting the Infinite. When marriage to a nobleman's daughter is the key to obtaining the land needed for the temple, Akabe impulsively goes against his advisors' counsel not to marry her.

Their marriage aligns him with the very ones who are trying to kill him and destroy the temple rebuilding efforts. Her family openly worships the goddess Atea but does the queen?

Kien and Ela travel with Akabe and Caitria, the new queen of Siphra, when assassination attempts continue. When the queen and Ela are kidnapped while the men are out hunting, the men are tested in their obedience to the Infinite. Will they wait on his leading? Will the women be freed and the temple built?

Larson returns with another well-written fantasy inspired by biblical events. Her characters are realistic, flawed, and endearing. Full of suspense, fighting, plot twists, action, love, and faith, *King* is a worthy finale to the Tales of the Infinite series. *King* is an indication of how Ms. Larson's continues to grow as a writer, and readers will look forward to her next book.

Recommended for public libraries as well as school libraries.

Carol R. Gehringer, Worthy2Read.wordpress.com

McGee, Krista

Anomaly / by Krista McGee.

HS (MS) Grades 8-12 Rating: 5

Krista McGee, author of several young adult contemporary novels, tries her hand at young adult dystopian fiction. She creates a future world where nuclear war survivors live below ground. Scientists engineer life so that emotions and sickness are eliminated, making everyone the same. Thalli, however, asks questions and feels emotions acutely, making her an anomaly in a world where being different carries a death sentence.

In *Anomaly*, Thalli manages to keep her emotions hidden until she experiences a piece of ancient music. So she is scheduled to die. Berk, a childhood friend and scientist in training, manages to delay her execution with the excuse of using her to further scientific studies. Thalli meets a man who tells her

about the Designer who created all life. The head scientist sets up an elaborate ruse to simulate life above ground and uses her relationship with Berk to force them to make decisions. Thalli must figure out whom to trust and what her purpose is in this world.

McGee does an excellent job of creating a plausible, futuristic world. *Anomaly* is both plot- and character- driven, with characters one cares about. The plot twists are incredible, and the ending unexpected. The faith element is integrated and well-done, as Thalli learns about the Designer. Fans of science fiction and Christian fiction will welcome this series.

This is the first of a trilogy, with *Luminary* coming in early 2014. Discussion questions are included.

Recommended for high school libraries, as well as adult collections in public libraries.

Carol R. Gehringer, CLJ

Stengl, Anne Elisabeth

Dragonwitch / by Anne Elisabeth Stengl. (Tales of Goldstone Wood, 4)

Bethany House ISBN 9780764210273

HS Grades 8-12 rating: 5

Award-winning author Anne Elisabeth Stengl continues her Tales of Goldstone Wood series with *Dragonwitch*, a highly imaginative fantasy with Christian subtexts.

In *Dragonwitch*, Lady Leta is engaged to the future King of the North Country whom she has never met. When she travels to Castle Gaheris, Leta assumes her betrothed is Lord Alistair, nephew of Earl Ferfox. Alistair is bothered by night terrors and recurring dreams.

Though pledged to marry the following year, neither of them are interested in a marriage to one another. Alistair broods and barely talks with her. Leta spends her time in the library, learning to read under the tutelage of the Chronicler, a dwarf-size man with a crucial secret. When Ferfox dies, everyone assumes his heir will be Lord Alistair, but Chronicler's secret impacts everything.

Meanwhile, in a faraway kingdom, priestesses worship the Dragonwitch in the Citadel of the Living Fire, while she searches for the sword and the only one that can use it against her. Goblins, a dwarf, a wingless dragon, faerie beasts, prophecies disguised as nursery rhymes, a girl disguised as a boy, and a blue star comprise the world of *Dragonwitch*.

The plot lines intersect weaving a tale sure to delight its readers. *Dragonwitch* is a both plot-and character-driven, with plot twists and back story to the earlier novels. It is a well-written fantasy that can be read without having read the earlier books, although readers of the other books in the series will appreciate the backstory more.

The Christian subtexts in *Dragonwitch* are more evident. For many readers, *Dragonwitch* put the puzzle pieces together for the earlier books.

Recommended for high school libraries, as well as teen collections in public libraries.

Carol R. Gehringer, www.worthy2read.wordpress.com

Books for Adults

Groot, Tracy

Flame of Resistance / by Tracy Groot.

Tyndale House Publishers ISBN 1414359470

Adult Rating: 5

It is the year 1944, and two complete strangers with completely different backgrounds find themselves thrown together in Nazi occupied France. French citizen Brigitte Durand has lost all hope. The Nazis have taken over more than just her country and home; they have taken her innocence and self-respect.

American fighter pilot Tom Jaeger has been shot down over France in enemy territory; thankfully, he is found by members of the French Resistance, who believe this tall, blond-hair, blue-eyed pilot could be of great use. Together, Brigitte and Tom become a part of the Resistance's mission to retrieve valuable information from the enemy. As they work together, will the noble Tom be able to look beyond Brigitte's past? Will Brigitte be able to find forgiveness? When the mission goes wrong, their lives are placed in jeopardy, and the friendship they have formed may never get the chance to be more.

In Tracy Groot's *Flame of Resistance*, a powerful story of sacrifice, forgiveness, and love is woven together. The plot is full of danger, adventure, and a dash of romance, creating enough suspense and tension to capture and hold the reader's interest. Though the characters and storyline are a work of fiction, the historical facts give readers a glimpse into real-life France during World War II. The characters are unique and fresh, full of raw emotion and enough flaws to make them real to readers. Brigitte is a fallen woman, full of shame and bitterness, while Tom is noble and upright, but perhaps too self-righteous. The sharp contrast drawn between the lives of the two main characters are two different, but equally wonderful, pictures of grace. In this novel are themes of restoration and renewed hope, of death and rebirth, of rising from the ashes of war to new life. Overall, this story is an excellent work of fiction and a wonderful tribute to those who dared to strike the spark of resistance in a country suppressed by tyranny.

Justina McBride, CLJ

Hauck, Rachel

Once Upon a Prince / by Rachel Hauck. (Royal Wedding Series, 1)

Zondervan ISBN 9780310315478

Adult Rating: 5

Award winner Rachel Hauck kicks off a new contemporary romance series on royal romances. This first book tells the modern fairy tale of a European prince on a holiday who falls in love with an American girl.

Once Upon a Prince tells of Prince Nathaniel who meets American commoner Susanna Truitt on St. Simon's Island just after Susanna's boyfriend breaks up with her. Under the Lover's Oaks, she spills her tale of woe to a stranger, Prince Nathaniel.

Nathaniel is traveling incognito while in America. He knows the throne will be his in less than a year, due to his father's poor health. Shortly after Nathaniel's identity is revealed to Susanna, Nathaniel returns to his kingdom as the new king following his father's death.

Nathaniel's brother invites Susanna to the coronation ball, hoping to show Nathaniel that he really isn't in love with her. When Susanna travels to Brighton for his coronation, he realizes he loves Susanna.

Nathaniel wants to marry for love, but there is the Marriage Act, preventing him from marrying a foreigner. There is also the problem with the neighboring country's independence and the missing heir.

Although the “royalty marries commoner” theme is popular in books and movies, Hauck manages to create a charming story with a sweet twist. One can easily envision *Once Upon a Prince* as a movie. The characters are easy to like. Hauck writes believable characters, especially secondary ones.

The faith element is evident: Susanna and Nathaniel are Christian, and wonder about God’s will for their lives. They pray for wisdom and direction. The faith element adds an interesting plot twist to this story.

Highly recommended for public libraries and adult collections.

Carol R. Gehringer, CLJ

Klassen, Julie

The Tutor’s Daughter / by Julie Klassen.

Bethany House ISBN 9780764210693

Adult (HS) Rating: 4

Award-winning author Julie Klassen returns with a historical fiction set in Regency England, introducing a widowed tutor, his spinster daughter, two former students, and a mystery set in an old manor house.

In *The Tutor’s Daughter*, Emma Smallwood travels with her father when he is hired to teach the younger brothers of two former students in Cornwall. The older brothers remember Emma from their days at her father’s school, and are more than eager to renew their friendship with her. Shortly after their arrival, mysterious things begin to happen -- a piano being played in the middle of the night, someone sneaking into Emma’s room, and more. What secrets are the Weston family hiding, and whom can Emma trust?

Ever since her mother died, Emma believes that God no longer answers her prayers and she no longer trusts in God. As she faces strange events in the manor, she finds herself more willing to believe in God again. This is especially true when she and Henry are locked in the chapel, and they face possible death as the water rises during the storm.

This book features a well-written plot with elements of gothic romance and romantic suspense: notes that mysteriously appear under Emma’s door, a young ward in love with one of the brothers, nighttime wanderings, frightening pictures, smugglers, a shipwreck, items disappearing from Emma’s room, a spinster aunt, and a strange cry in the night. Readers will enjoy the descriptive narration, mounting suspense and clean romance, in this enjoyable nod to the style of Jane Austen and Jane Eyre. An author’s note about some historical facts, and discussion questions are included.

Recommended for public libraries as well as school libraries.

Carol R. Gehringer, Worthy2Read.wordpress.com

Mills, DiAnn

The Chase: A Novel / by DiAnn Mills. (Crime Scene: Houston, 1)

Zondervan ISBN 978-0310333173

Adult Rating: 5

Award-winning author DiAnn Mills presents a new contemporary suspense series featuring an FBI agent and a fiction writer who join forces to solve a cold case.

In *The Chase*, Kariss Walker wants to base a suspense novel on an unsolved murder of an unidentified young girl that she reported on when she was a TV news anchor five years ago. The horror of the case reminds her of a painful incident in her past. Though a writer of women’s fiction now, Kariss has a passion to write a suspense novel, even when her agent is reluctant to represent her.

Calling in a favor from an FBI supervisor, she is teamed with Agent Tigo Harris to research FBI procedures and learn more about the little girl’s death. Kariss convinces them to re-open the case, putting both of them in danger. Solving the case involves a gang Tigo is investigating, her sister’s ex-husband, and a few unsavory businessmen.

The faith element is light. Kariss was raised in a Christian home but has fallen away from her roots. Her faith is renewed when she narrowly escapes death several times. Tigo has a faith-filled mother who has encouraged her son to follow God.

Mills writes unpredictable stories with realistic characters, and some are quite unsavory. As expected, the violence is appropriate for the storyline. The relationship between Kariss and Tigo develops slowly. Clearly, they are attracted to one another, but they are focused more on solving the case. *The Chase* also includes author notes and discussion questions. Fans of Catherine Coulter's FBI series and of Dee Henderson will also enjoy this series.

Carol R. Gehringer, CLJ

Mills, DiAnn

The Survivor: A Novel / by DiAnn Mills. (Crime Scene: Houston, 2)

Zondervan ISBN 978-0310333173

Adult Rating: 5

Award-winning author DiAnn Mills continues her suspense series featuring an FBI agent and a fiction writer who join forces to solve cases.

Suspense novelist Kariss Walker and FBI agent Tigo Harris work together again in *The Survivor*. The story takes place about six months after the events in *The Chase*, Mills' earlier book. Dr. Amy Garrett sends Kariss an email about surviving a crime that was attempted twenty-three years earlier. She wants Kariss to use it as the basis for her next novel to inspire women to become survivors.

Meanwhile, Tigo investigates a car bombing involving his FBI supervisor's friend. Both are caught up with their individual cases, wondering how to resolve their feelings for one another. Someone threatens Kariss as she investigates the facts behind Amy's story. When Dr. Garrett's car is bombed and the bombs are identical to those in Tigo's case, their danger intensifies. Can they solve the case before one of them is killed? Will Kariss live to write the ending of her latest novel?

Mills writes action-packed, suspense novels with realistic characters. As expected, the violence is appropriate for the storyline. The faith element is light but evident. At the beginning of *The Survivor*, Kariss becomes a Christian, and Tigo is still an unbeliever. She breaks off their dating relationship. Tigo struggles with his concept of God in the face of the evil he deals with on a daily basis.

The Survivor also includes author notes and discussion questions. Fans of Catherine Coulter's FBI series and of Dee Henderson will also enjoy this series.

Carol R. Gehringer, CLJ

Pettrey, Dani

Stranded / by Dani Pettrey (Alaskan Courage, 3)

Bethany House ISBN 978-0764209840

Adult (HS) Rating: 5

Dani Pettrey returns to the Alaskan wilderness, with another romantic suspense novel featuring the McKenna family.

In *Stranded*, Darcy St. James, a former investigative reporter, responds to a friend's plea for help with a big story. When Darcy arrives at the Alaskan cruise ship, her friend has disappeared, and no one has answers for her. She remains on board as a travel reporter, and puts her life at risk as she investigates the mysterious disappearance.

Meanwhile, Gage McKenna is setting up adventure excursions for the cruise passengers on the cruise ship where Darcy is working. Gage and Darcy met earlier (in *Shattered*). But they have had no contact for

the past five months due to a misunderstanding. They are surprised to run into each other again, and sparks begin to fly!

Darcy discovers a pattern to recent shipboard disappearances of other passengers. When Darcy's life is in danger, Gage realizes how much he really cares for her. Together they try to unravel the sinister plot and find her friend before it is too late.

Pettrey crafts a mystery that will leave the reader guessing "who-done-it." *Stranded* is filled with spine-tingling suspenseful plot twists, excellent character development, and just the right touch of romance. Her characters are imperfect and realistic—they endear themselves to the reader as they struggle with faith and relationship issues. As an author, Pettrey just gets better and better with each book in this series. Her next book, *Silenced*, is expected in 2014.

Fans of Dee Henderson, Irene Hanson, and other Christian suspense writers will not want to miss this next installment in the Alaska Courage series.

Recommended for high school libraries, as well as adult collections in public libraries.

Carol R. Gehringer , Worthy2Read.wordpress.com

Rue, Nancy

Too Far to Say Far Enough: A Novel / by Nancy Rue. (Reluctant Prophet, 3)

David C. Cook ISBN 978-1-4347-6490-4

Adult Rating: 4

Prolific author Nancy Rue concludes her contemporary fiction series as Allison Chamberlain acts on divine nudges, regardless of the cost to her. This series challenges its readers to consider how comfortable they might have become in their relationship with God and whether He is nudging them in another direction.

In *Too Far to Say Enough*, Allison adopts Desmond, a teenage boy, when his mother dies after life on the streets. Two Sacrament Houses are now open to serve former prostitutes, and a secondhand clothing boutique is opening. Allison continues to confront the dark side of the West King Street neighborhood.

Troy Irwin, Allison's former friend, continues to harass her, and a young runaway girl—Flannery—is rescued from prostitution. Allison feels God nudging her to help Flannery, but this might be her biggest challenge yet. Chief wants to marry Allison, but she still has a past relationship with Troy to resolve before moving into a new future. Troy still rouses intense feelings. God is nudging her to go the extra mile with the man she considers a painful part of her past. Every time Allison responds to God's nudges, it comes with a cost. Will she respond to the latest nudge to *love an extra mile*? And what will it cost her this time?

Rue's characters are flawed and realistic, helping the reader to look past stereotypes in the church. This book shows what it means to really listen and respond to God's leading. Character and plot-driven, the book includes notes from the author and more information about what to do with nudges.

Recommended for church libraries and book clubs.

Carol R. Gehringer, CLJ

White, Linda J.

Seeds of Evidence / by Linda J. White.

Abingdon Press ISBN 1426735421

Adult Rating: 4

While on vacation in Chincoteague, FBI Special Agent Kit McGovern is thrust into a murder investigation when she finds the body of a young Latino boy on the beach. She teams up with Washington, DC police

officer David O'Connor, who is on administrative leave after a shooting incident. Together they follow clues from the island to the mainland and back and fight their growing attraction for each other.

The book starts slow, and the dialogue is sometimes stilted, but the story soon picks up traction, and the reader is caught up in the plot. The descriptions are rich with vivid imagery enabling the reader to easily visualize the scenes. The characters are flawed yet realistic and engaging as they struggle with their faith while solving the case.

A police procedural, the book offers an excellent behind-the-scenes view of an FBI investigation. It is a clean read and successfully deals with issues of forgiveness and redemption.

Linda Matchett, CLJ