



Q and A

An interview with Jill Williamson

Q: Tell us about yourself.

I grew up in rural Alaska with no electricity, an outhouse, and a lot of mosquitoes. Thankfully it was the land of the midnight sun. In the summer I could stay up and read by the daylight that wouldn't go away. But in the winter there was nothing better to do than daydream.

I went to college in Idaho and met my husband, Brad, who wanted to make movies. Since I'd always wanted to be a fashion designer, we made a deal. We'd go to Manhattan for one year—so I could attend the Fashion Institute of Technology—then we'd move to Los Angeles. We did just that. We lived in LA for nine years. About halfway through that time we both discovered God was calling us to different things. Brad went back to school and became a youth pastor. I began to write. We currently live in Eastern Oregon. My husband is a youth pastor and we are both involved with Young Life.

Q: How and why did you become a writer?

Back in 2004 I started writing articles for magazines. I wanted to be a speaker at teen events, so I focused on periodicals for teens. Then the new Harry Potter book came out, and another barrage of debates within the church community flared up as to whether or not the books were evil. I remember wishing there were more options for Christian kids whose parents didn't want them reading general market books. There was quite a variety of Christian novels for teen girls, but little for boys. This inspired me to write that kind of a book.

I worked on that first novel about three years then I wrote another. Then another. *By Darkness Hid* came out in April 2009. It was my first published novel, but the fifth one I wrote.

Q: Where do you get ideas for stories?

I got the idea for *By Darkness Hid* from a strange dream. And later, as I was pushing my boy in the stroller on a walk, we passed under a tree that was half burned down. Half of it was black and dead and the other half was green and leafy. I was inspired. I brainstormed a plot about a world that was half dead and half living. Another story I wrote popped into my head on a drive to an apple orchard near Rochester, New York. I thought, What if some crazy scientists were growing people instead of fruit? So the idea of *Jason Farms* was born, which is a suspense story about a girl who discovers a cloning lab. Ideas are everywhere.

Q: Tell us about *By Darkness Hid*.

Achan is a fifteen-year-old stray. Strays are socially lower than slaves in the land of Er'Rets. Achan serves his master in the kitchens of Sitna manor. A Kingsguard knight approaches Achan and offers to train him as a squire. Such ambition is forbidden for strays, but Achan jumps at the chance to try and make a better life for himself. He begins training in secret with the sword, axe, and dagger. But when Achan begins to hear voices, he wonders if he might be going mad.

Vrell is a noblewoman who has gone into hiding dressed as a stray boy to avoid being married to a horrible man. But Vrell's own gifts make her a target for greedy men. Two Kingsguard knights arrive to escort her to Mahanaim where she is expected to use her gifts to serve the Council of Seven. Vrell strives

to keep her true gender and identity hidden as she and her escorts journey to the great city. Her path eventually crosses Achan's on the battlefield.

I originally wrote *By Darkness Hid* for the young adult market, but it was published as a book for all ages. And you don't have to be a fantasy fan to enjoy this book. It's fast-paced and suspenseful and even has a bit of romance.

Q: What did you enjoy most about writing this book?

Researching sword fighting was really fun. The training and fighting scenes in my book improved greatly as a result of that research. I also enjoyed researching medieval medicine.

Q: What message do you hope to convey in your writing?

That God is the desire of our hearts. No matter what we face, knowing him will make life more worthwhile. He created us for a purpose. If we want to know our purpose, we must discover him.

Q: What advice would you give to an author just starting out?

Make yourself write until you finish a book. Then write another one. The more you write, the more you'll learn. Then you can go back and see what needs rewriting. But most writers never even finish that first book. Some start lots of books and never finish one. You can't be an author if you can't finish a book. Set a goal and don't give up.

Q: What new projects are you working on?

I'm polishing up *To Darkness Fled* (Blood of Kings, book 2). Then I'm going to start writing the third and final book in the trilogy. I also have a few other projects that my agent is shopping around. *The New Recruit* is about a Christian spy organization. *Jason Farms* is about a girl who discovers that her dad is working at a cloning lab.

Q: Where can readers buy your book?

You can purchase it online from Amazon or Barnes and Noble. And if your local bookstore doesn't carry it, they'll order it for you. If you're interested in an autographed copy, you can purchase those through my website. Also, many libraries carry my book. If yours doesn't, ask them to order it.

Q: Where can readers find you online?

My website is www.jillwilliamson.com. I'm also on Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Shoutlife, Shelfari, GoodReads, and Amazon. I have links to all these pages on my website.

And there are also my other two websites: Novel Teen Book Reviews at www.novelteen.com and www.teenageauthors.com.

Q: Is there anything we can do to help your book do well?

If you liked it, tell everyone you know about it. And go online to any and all places that allow you to post a book review and post your thoughts. You don't have to write an amazing review. Just be honest and say what you liked and disliked. Those two things are the most helpful things you can do. And if you do write a review, email it to me and I'll post it on my website as well.

