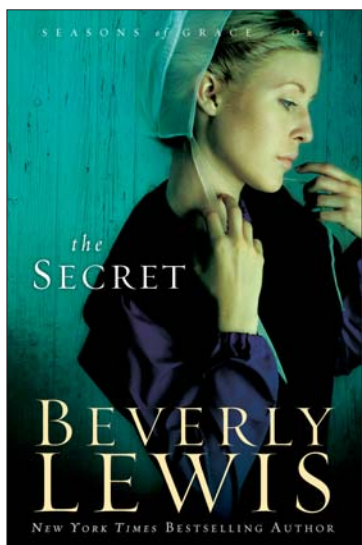


QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS WITH BEVERLY LEWIS



The Secret

SEASONS OF GRACE - 1

by Beverly Lewis

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1. What can you tell us about your new book, *The Secret*?

I have begun a new contemporary series which I'm so passionate about, titled SEASONS OF GRACE. The series is set in the village of Bird-in-Hand in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. When the book opens, Grace is about to celebrate her 21st birthday and is expecting a proposal from her long-time beau any day. But all is not as it should be in the Byler home. Her mother weeps at night and disappears for hours on end, while her father refuses to discuss the situation. When her mother disappears, Grace is forced to put her own life on hold to pick up the pieces her mother left behind.

2. What can you tell us about your main character, Grace Byler?

Grace is a young Amish woman who loves tending her herb garden and learning about traditional remedies passed down by her grandmother. She also works part-time in a natural foods store. She is hardworking and kind, a good example to her younger sister, a confidante to her brothers, and a help to her father. She has always been known as a sensitive, perceptive soul—so why can't she figure out what is wrong with her mother?

3. You mentioned that your main character, Grace, works in a health food store. Is it common for Amish women to work outside the home?

Yes, it is becoming increasingly common for unmarried Amish women in Lancaster County to work outside the home as waitresses, housekeepers, or nannies. Married women are more likely to remain in the home to raise their children, and—if there is time—run a small business, such as a produce stand, bakery, or quilt shop from their own home or a small shop built on the property.

4. Can you give us a hint about the “secret” the title refers to?

There are several secrets in the book: Why is Grace's mother so sad? Where does she go when she disappears at night and why does she eventually leave home? Will she ever return? And Grace's mother is not the only person with secrets. A young English woman arrives in Bird-in-Hand, bringing a secret of her own....

5. You mention this series is contemporary. Has life for modern-day Amish people changed much during the past few decades?

In some ways, very little, but in other ways, technology, modern conveniences, and the cottage industry have trickled into Amish life. In some church districts, women are allowed to use cell phones for their businesses, for example, but not for personal use. One Amish bishop allows a Honda gas engine to power a cake mixer in a bakery shop.

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Some bishops allow rubber tires on farm equipment if it is not owned, but rather rented, by the farmer. Some Amish businessmen are permitted to use a copy machine, hooked up to a generator. Others don't want to "push the line too much." Some bishops allow hay balers; others don't. Solar panels are being produced and sold by an Amishman in Lancaster County...his biggest customer base is Amish farmers. These are just a few examples of the changes that have occurred in the past 20+ years.

6. One of the interesting subplots in *The Secret* deals with a modern grad student who comes to Lancaster County to pursue natural healing for an illness. Tell us about that.

Heather Nelson is diagnosed with a devastating illness, but isn't content to go along with the harsh treatments her own mother endured before her death. Instead, she decides to soak up the peace of Amish country while pursuing alternative medicine under the care of a naturopath. While in the area she stays in an Amish B & B, where she receives warm hospitality and friendship, as well as hope.

7. You have written more than 80 books. How do you keep coming up with new ideas for stories?

New storylines are triggered in my mind when I read the *Lancaster New Era*, as well as *The Budget*, or when listening to the unique (and sometimes humorous) tales told to me by Amish friends, as well as my readers. But, most of all, my ideas come from having a creative imagination and an understanding that Amish people are human, too. Even though they live in a cloistered community, their struggles are similar to our own and readers can easily relate to them.

8. You have been called the world's most-loved author of Amish fiction. Do you have friends and contacts among the Amish community that keep your stories so authentic?

Oh yes, wonderful friends. I grew up near Amish farmland and still have many Plain relatives and friends there. I've lived with two Amish families during two separate summers and try to visit Lancaster County often. I keep in touch by writing many letters—even some emails, believe it or not.

9. What are you working on next?

I am writing book two: *The Missing*, in the SEASONS OF GRACE series. It is scheduled for release in early September of this year.

10. How can readers keep up with your work?

They can visit beverlylewis.com and sign up for my newsletter. There are also delicious Amish recipes, book excerpts, and news of my upcoming book tour at the site.