

How the Light Gets In

Q&A WITH JOLINA PETERSHEIM

1. *You and your husband went through an intense health scare shortly after moving to Wisconsin. How did that affect your marriage, parenting, and writing?*

It's amazing how we can just be cruising along through life, seeing each other but not really *perceiving*, and then experience a wake-up call that radically transforms our lives. Randy's brain surgery did that for us. We'd been living on our farm for eight weeks when it happened, and we had a two-and-a-half-year-old and a four-month-old. It forced my husband to rely on me for the first time in our marriage (he is incredibly independent), and, by default, it forced me to grow up. That shift was so healthy for us, though challenging, and I feel like we're now standing on equal ground. It impacted my parenting because every day I am reminded of what matters and what doesn't. I am more relaxed when it comes to my housework, and the messes the girls make. I also find that I have to give myself grace on the days when I don't remember what really matters. I am never going to be a perfect parent, but I know Jesus loves my daughters perfectly, and I can always ask their forgiveness and point them back to him. This experience impacted my writing in two ways: it forced my characters to wrestle with some intense questions, since I use them to understand what I think and believe, and it forced me to take a good look at my priorities. I love writing, and I believe that God has given me a gift, and yet I never want the gift to take precedence over the Giver.

2. *How do you hope the novel will resonate with your audience? What are you most excited for your readers to experience through reading this story?*

Last spring, I went to a conference, and at that conference I got to pray with people from different continents and give them hugs. On the way home, I thought about my writing being a way I can pray with and hug people from all around the world. Ruth's story is incredibly personal to me, as it helped me wrestle with my questions concerning God's will versus free will, and how our choices alter the trajectory of our lives. My greatest hope for *How the Light Gets In* is that women who are finding themselves in the throes of major transition will be able to find healing for their hearts and hope for their spirits. I also want readers to take a good look at Ruth's journey and see how they might pursue their creative gifts. I am a firm believer that we are all artists in one medium or another, since we're created in the Artist's image. Our hearts come alive when we're taking time to use these gifts. I am so adamant about this creative pursuit because I used to struggle with "mama guilt" for taking time to write each day. However, I began to see that I am setting a standard for my own three girls. When they have children of their own, I would love to see them pursue an outlet that helps pour back into their hearts. One of my favorite quotes is by St. Irenaeus, "For the glory of God is the living man, and the life of man is the vision of God." Find out what gift makes your heart come alive and pursue it.

3. *You're a wife and a busy mama to three little girls. When do you find the time to write?*

Nap time, ha! I signed my first contract when my firstborn daughter, now six, was three months old. Therefore, my girls have grown up knowing that I take two hours in the afternoon for "quiet time." It's one of my favorite times of day, when the entire household winds down, and my girls look at books or color while I type. Of course, some days are more challenging than others, but I also write in town one day a week while my mom (AKA "Oma") watches the girls. I'm also the crazy mom who writes while my daughter's in dance class, and I have been known to have a *Eureka!* moment while steam-mopping the floor.

4. *You've been a part of a book club for ten years. Has being a published author changed your perspective as a reader?*

There are five of us in our book club (we're kind of a food club, too, because we always eat), and we each have very different reading preferences. Sometimes, a novel will come along that we all love (*I Capture the Castle* by Dodie Smith), but more often than not, a few of us will love a novel and a few of us won't. The great thing about reading is that we're sharing a common story through different perspectives. No perspective is right; no perspective is wrong. Knowing this gives me freedom as a reader. It also gives me freedom as an author to create stories that aren't always neatly wrapped up, because such stories offer opportunities for discussion and, hopefully, growth.

5. *How has your Mennonite heritage (and your husband's Amish heritage) impacted your life today?*

Well, we can't seem to get away from wanting a woodstove! We're in the middle of building our house, and we're looking at putting a woodstove in the living room area. We imagine using it for homemade pizza and bread, but more than likely it will just sit there, collecting dust. We also dream of homesteading in a smaller way (my husband's putting in a canning room in our house) and eventually raising sheep for meat. We also try to keep from becoming too busy. One of the best ways we gauge this is by how many family meals we can eat together each week. There's something about gathering around the table that just soothes my heart (I also like to feed people), and I find that our girls react positively to this time as well. The "Favorite Day" game, mentioned in *How the Light Gets In*, is something we do each night after dinner. It's a way to talk about our different experiences and reconnect. Plus, it teaches my girls to look for the silver lining even on the cloudy days.

6. *Have you always wanted to be a writer?*

I remember sitting on the front steps of our house in Cross Plains, Tennessee, when I was around three- or four-years-old and making a song up that I then performed for my mother. She praised me and made me feel very special, even if I couldn't really sing, and I was bitten by the story bug. My father also wrote songs. He built storage barns for a living, and whenever inspiration would strike, he would jot lyrics down on stray 2" x 4"s with a carpenter's pencil. I was so used to seeing this while riding around in his saw-dusted Dodge Ram truck that I never thought it was

unique. Now, however, that memory touches me deeply because it reminds me of how he sacrificed his creative dreams to make sure we were supported. Because of that sacrifice, I am able to pursue my creative gifts. I want to steward them well.