

BOOK CLUB KIT

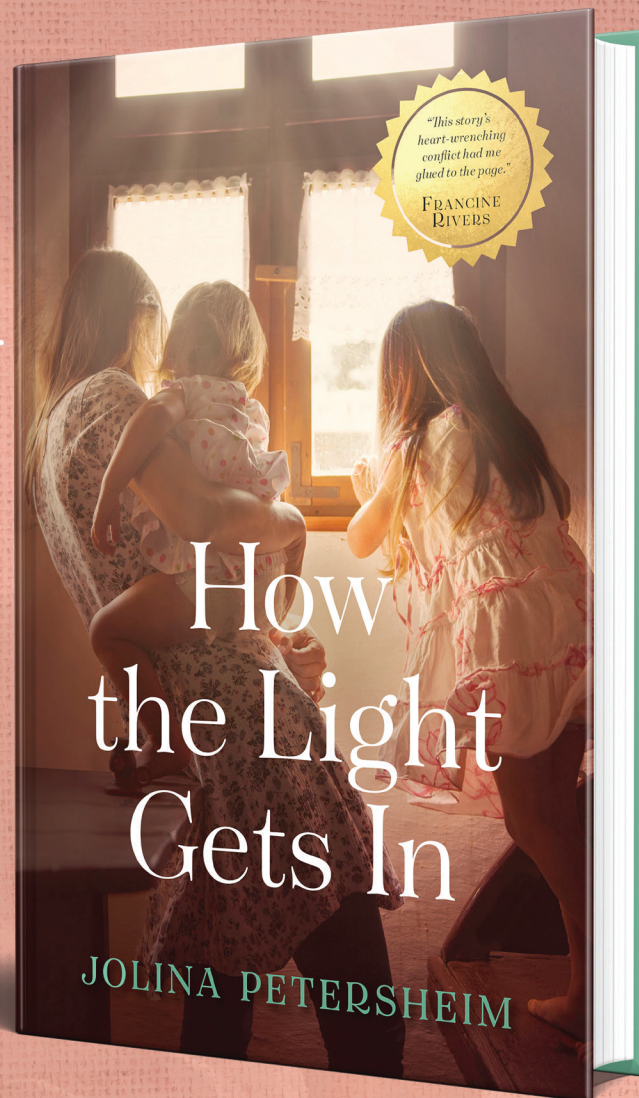
www.jolinapetersheim.com

An engrossing novel about marriage and motherhood, loss and moving on.

*“How the Light Gets In is . . . a story that asks the big questions: What makes us whole, and how do we find our worth? Sometimes we use the words *forgiveness*, *redemption*, and *love* without understanding their depths, but Petersheim digs deep to portray the cost and worth of these values. A novel both penetrating and surprising—don’t miss it!”*

PATTI CALLAHAN HENRY

New York Times bestselling author of *The Bookshop at Water’s End*



A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Five years ago, I took a walk in Wisconsin with my one-year-old daughter. It was below freezing, and the windchill made it feel colder. I remember bundling her into the stroller so snugly she could barely move. Her brown eyes blinked at me between the pink hat and the fleece blanket I'd pulled up to her chin. The yard of my husband's uncle and aunt's white farmhouse, where we were staying, was studded with giant hardwood trees. The lavender sky was a backslash for red dairy barns, and the gravel road beneath the stroller's wheels was an icy white sheet.

Once we returned to the farmhouse, I put my daughter down for a nap and thought about a woman coming to Wisconsin after losing almost everything. That's when I knew I would write a modern retelling of Ruth set in a Mennonite community. What I did not know was that two years later, my husband and I would sell our home in Tennessee and move, with two little girls by then, to a home with grid-tie solar power seven miles from that Wisconsin farm where I had the idea for *How the Light Gets In*.

A few months after we moved, my husband's uncle shared a newspaper clipping with me regarding a local cranberry farmer who only used old-fashioned equipment. Turns out, Wisconsin is the nation's leading producer of cranberries. I could picture my modern Ruth in a flooded bog, gleaning berries, just like the biblical Ruth gleaning barley in the fields.



A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

I will forever cherish the season we spent in Wisconsin. Sometimes I can still hear the off-kilter squeak of the windmill that stood in our front yard or the sound of windows cranking open on the first warm day of spring. But by the end of our second winter, I asked my husband if we could move home to Tennessee. We had moved to Wisconsin on a two-year “try it out” plan, and I was asking to leave even before the two years were up.



My husband had poured himself into our little homestead: remodeling the 1920s farmhouse, raising and butchering chickens, putting new boards on the old dairy barn, planting three hundred pine trees and long rows of raspberries and blueberries, sowing wildflowers, and building raised garden beds. He was living his dream in Wisconsin—the place he’d started visiting when he was a teenager and would go hunting for weeks at a time—and now I was asking him to give it up. Knowing how lonely I was for our families in Tennessee, my husband put our farm on the market, and to our great surprise, it sold two weeks later.

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR



We moved back to Tennessee and entered the hardest season of our marriage. My husband had dreamed of homesteading in Wisconsin, and now he had sacrificed that dream to bring me home. He never verbally expressed resentment, but the tension between us was palpable. Around Christmastime, I spoke with an older woman friend about our situation. Her advice was simple, and yet it changed everything: she told me I needed to put my husband at the forefront of my prayer life. Up until that point, frustration had prevented me from really praying for him, but now I began in earnest. Early in the morning, before the girls awoke, I would walk around our land and pray for our marriage. I prayed for the ability to understand the loss of my husband's dreams. And you know what? I began to understand his perspective. I began to appreciate what he had sacrificed to bring me home.

Over a year has passed since that difficult season, and I have never loved and respected my husband more. There's something about walking through hardship together that brings those rote marriage vows to life. Furthermore, I now know my husband can never be responsible for my happiness, for my wholeness; neither can I be responsible for his. We each have to pursue an intimate relationship with Jesus to experience true, lasting intimacy with each other, and this independent pursuit has drawn us more closely together than anything. My husband and I talked about this experience today when we were in our minivan, our now three little girls all piled in the back. He said, "When I gave my dreams and the desires of my heart to Jesus, I found that he became the dream and the desire of my heart."

Friends, my dream and the desire of my heart for this novel is to offer hope to marriages, especially those enduring challenging times due to the stresses of life—children, jobs, health, ministry obligations, you name it. Many of the emotions Ruth deals with in this story were in some part drawn from my actual experiences. Please know that I did not write those scenes from a place of judgment, but from a place of empathy. I want you to know that there's a community out there, wanting to press your hand and murmur, "I've been there too." So please, don't give up hope. Your love story is not over. It is just beginning.



Jolina Petersheim
AUTHOR & SPEAKER

WHAT'S A PARTY WITHOUT FOOD?

When we lived in Wisconsin, I met my neighbor Jessica Rogers when I bought two dozen ears of sweet corn from her roadside stand. Over the next few months, we went apple picking, made cheese, and Jessica, bless her heart, tried to teach me how to paint. She is incredibly talented in the domestic arts, which are showcased on her blog, so she was the first person I thought of when I needed some cranberry recipes. Though Jessica and I are no longer neighbors, we are still close in spirit. I know you are going to love the delicious recipes, beautiful writing, and photography she has to offer on the following pages and on her blog at theyellowfarmhouseonthehill.wordpress.com. Enjoy!

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**Buttermilk
Cranberry Bars**



**Cranberry
Orange Scones**



**Cranberry Bog
Punch**



BUTTERMILK CRANBERRY BARS

INGREDIENTS

- ½ cup unsalted butter, room temperature
- zest from 1 orange
- 1 cup white sugar
- 1 egg, room temperature
- 1 tsp. vanilla

- 2 cups flour (set aside a few tablespoons of flour to coat the cranberries in)
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- ¾ tsp. kosher salt
- 2 cups fresh cranberries—coat in some of the flour before adding to the batter
- ½ cup buttermilk

CREAM CHEESE FROSTING

- ½ cup butter, softened
- 8 oz cream cheese, softened
- 4 cups powdered sugar
- 1½ tsp. vanilla

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Cream butter with orange zest and sugar until light and fluffy.
2. Add the egg and vanilla. Beat until combined.
3. Whisk together flour, baking powder, and salt in a separate bowl.
4. Add flour mixture to the batter, a little at a time, alternating with the buttermilk. Fold in the flour-coated cranberries.
5. Grease a 9"×13" baking pan. Spread batter into pan. Bake for 35 minutes, then check to see if it is done by touching the top gently or by inserting a toothpick. Let cool completely.
6. Cream cheese frosting: Beat together butter and cream cheese until smooth, then add powdered sugar and vanilla. Beat until smooth and creamy. Frost the bars once they have cooled, and serve!



“A mother’s love and a mother’s duty war with a woman’s need to feel loved and whole in a story that will stay with you long after you close the final page and leave you pondering: *Which path would I take?*”

LISA WINGATE | *New York Times* bestselling author of *Before We Were Yours*



CRANBERRY ORANGE SCONES

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups unbleached all-purpose flour
- 1 tbsp. baking powder
- ¼ cup granulated sugar, plus 2 tbsp. to sprinkle on top
- ½ tsp. salt

- ½ tsp. orange zest
- 5 tbsp. chilled, unsalted butter (diced)
- 1½ cups cranberries (fresh or frozen)
- 1 cup heavy whipping cream
- 1½ tbsp. melted butter

GLAZE

- 3 tbsp. melted butter
- 1½ cups powdered sugar
- 2 tbsp. orange juice
- 1½ tsp. orange zest

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 425°F.
2. In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, granulated sugar, salt, and 1½ teaspoons orange zest. With a pastry blender, cut in the diced butter until mixture resembles coarse crumbs.
3. Stir in cranberries, then add cream. Stir JUST until dough begins to form.
4. Divide dough in half. On a floured surface, shape each half into a 6" disc. The dough will be sticky. You can sprinkle it with a little extra flour if needed. Using a floured knife or bench scraper, cut into 8 wedges. Transfer to large cookie sheet, either floured or lined with parchment paper. Brush with 1½ tablespoons of the melted butter. Bake 13–16 minutes or until the edges are light golden brown. Cool for 10 minutes, then transfer to wire rack.
5. Orange glaze: Place powdered sugar, remaining 1½ teaspoons orange zest, 1½ tablespoons melted butter, and 2 tablespoons orange juice in a medium bowl. Stir until smooth. Drizzle glaze over warm scones after they have cooled a bit. Enjoy!



“I love how Jolina Petersheim translates timeless truths into can’t-put-down fiction. This story’s heart-wrenching conflict had me glued to the page.”

FRANCINE RIVERS | *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Masterpiece*



CRANBERRY BOG PUNCH

This delicious punch will transport you and your guests to the cranberry bogs of Wisconsin with its fresh, slightly tart and sweet flavors! Assemble and freeze an ice ring the day before, using fresh cranberries and mint leaves, for a truly festive look.

INGREDIENTS

- 64 oz cranberry raspberry juice, chilled
- 1 liter ginger ale, chilled
- 1 liter lemon-lime soda, chilled
- 12 oz raspberries
- ½ cup cranberries, divided
- 2 tbsp. sugar
- 8 scoops raspberry sherbet

INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a food processor, puree 6 oz of raspberries and the sugar. Put in a punch bowl.
2. Add juice, ginger ale, and lemon-lime soda to punch bowl and stir.
3. Place ice ring in the center and garnish the punch with sherbet, cranberries, and remaining raspberries.



“Jolina Petersheim writes so vividly that you taste the morning coffee and smell the peat from the cranberry bog. More than this, you will feel the ache deep inside Ruth as she wrestles with the desire for something just out of her grasp. With surprising twists and powerful themes, this story will sink into your soul and give you hope.”

CHRIS FABRY | Bestselling author of *Under a Cloudless Sky*

QUESTION & ANSWER WITH THE AUTHOR

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

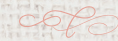
It's amazing how we can just be cruising along through life, seeing each other but not really *perceiving*, and then experience a wake-up call that radically transforms our lives. Randy's brain surgery did that for us. We'd been living on our farm for eight weeks when it happened, and we had a two-and-a-half-year-old 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.

How do you hope the novel will resonate with your audience? What are you most excited for your readers to experience through 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 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

QUESTION & ANSWER WITH THE AUTHOR



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 own 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.

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.

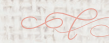
You've been part of a book club for ten years. Has being a published author changed your perspective as a reader?

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.

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 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

QUESTION & ANSWER WITH THE AUTHOR



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.

Have you always wanted to be a writer? What are you working on next?

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 2x4s with a carpenter's pencil. I was so used to seeing this while riding around in his sawdusted 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.

As for what's next, I am currently working on a new novel and a nonfiction project that explores the two topics dearest to my heart: marriage and motherhood.

MUSIC PLAYLIST INSPIRED BY THE NOVEL

I turn off the internet while writing, but otherwise, I listen to worship music all day to create an atmosphere of peace in our home. The following songs unveil some facets of Ruth's spiritual journey, and my own journey as well.



Pieces | *Steffany Gretzinger*
<https://youtu.be/fl9aqfmVmPc>

Starlight | *Amanda Cook*
<https://youtu.be/enCf0Cy949Q>

I Am No Victim | *Kristene DiMarco*
<https://youtu.be/FxmDMqc15Ak>

Love Like This | *Lauren Daigle*
https://youtu.be/Br1q_i1RHPU

You're Gonna Be OK | *Brian & Jenn Johnson*
<https://youtu.be/LjF9IqvXDjY>

I'm Listening | *Chris McClarney*
<https://youtu.be/Ef52AmdVwYI>

Spirit Lead Me | *Michael Ketterer*
<https://youtu.be/1Ko4yroBP0A>

Mention of Your Name | *Jenn Johnson*
<https://youtu.be/HBrv6hKhdzg>

Breakthrough | *Chris McClarney*
<https://youtu.be/a-Y4SW3dx7U>

It Is Well | *Kristene DiMarco*
<https://youtu.be/YNqo4Un2uZI>

New Wine | *Hillsong Worship*
<https://youtu.be/1ozGKIOzEVc>

Open Up Let the Light In | *Steffany Gretzinger*
<https://youtu.be/ilceibZfO9o>

“Jolina Petersheim’s *How the Light Gets In* chronicles one woman’s experience with motherhood, a fractured marriage, piercing grief, and glimpses of new hope. Petersheim’s gentle retelling of the story of Ruth will both stir and settle the hearts of her readers.”

LAUREN K. DENTON | *Bestselling author of *The Hideaway**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. This novel asks significant questions about marriage and commitment. How do you feel about the answers Ruth comes up with? How might your choices have differed from hers?
2. Ruth and Chandler are probably a typical couple whose jobs and children cause them to move apart emotionally, even before they are physically separated. Have you experienced a similar challenge in your marriage, or have you seen this happen to people you know? What could they have done differently to prevent this estrangement?
3. Elam set aside his dreams of marriage and family because the circumstances were never right for it. Do you have dreams that have yet to be fulfilled or which you've had to set aside for a season? How did Elam keep from growing bitter at having his dream deferred? What can we learn from his example?
4. Chandler is doing good, important work in the world, and yet his family suffers for it. Have you ever been in this situation? What are some ways we can discern the right priorities for our various commitments and obligations?
5. Did you enjoy learning a little about cranberry harvesting? What was particularly interesting or surprising about it?
6. Did you enjoy reading Ruth and Chandler's letters to each other in the years before this story takes place? Did they enhance the story for you, or did you find them distracting?
7. How did you react when Ruth chose between Chandler and Elam? Was it the choice you wanted her to make? Why or why not?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



8. What was your reaction to the conclusion of the story? Did you find it satisfying or frustrating? Why do you think the author chose to tell the story this way?
9. Why do you think Ruth chooses this strategy to work out her loss? What does she gain by it? Does it seem like a realistic way to process grief?
10. Good novels often present what feel like no-win moral dilemmas. Can you pose another way that Ruth's story might have played out? Another way you would have preferred? Why?
11. Which characters in the book have a "happy ending"? Is that good enough for you, or do you wish the author had resolved things differently? How do you see things unfolding for the characters in the months and years ahead?
12. The author used the biblical book of Ruth as a stepping-off point for this fictional story. What similarities did you see? What are some of the differences? How do you feel about using Bible events as the basis for fiction?

“Jolina Petersheim draws the story of widowhood, finding family, and rewriting one’s own life story with great grace and gentle tenderness, once again proving herself to be a standout voice in Christian fiction.”

KRISTY WOODSON HARVEY | Bestselling author of *Slightly South of Simple*