

# **The Amish Midwife**

## **by Mindy Starns Clark and Leslie Gould**

### About the Book

A dusty carved box containing two locks of hair and a century-old letter regarding property in Switzerland, and a burning desire to learn about her biological family lead nurse-midwife Lexie Jaeger from her home in Oregon to the heart of Pennsylvania Amish country. There she meets Marta Bayer, a mysterious lay-midwife who desperately needs help after an Amish client and her baby die.

Lexie steps in to assume Marta's patient load even as she continues the search for her birth family, and from her patients she learns the true meaning of the Pennsylvania Dutch word *demut*, which means "to let be" as she changes from a woman who wants to control everything to a woman who depends on God.

A compelling story about a search for identity and the ability to trust that God securely holds our whole life—past, present, and future.

### Praise for the Book

*"The Amish Midwife is a compelling page-turner with characters so believably drawn they took my breath away. Lexie's spiritual journey touched my heart in a way that will live on even though I've turned the last page."*

—Pam Hanson, co-author with Barbara Andrews of women's inspirational fiction  
for *Guideposts*

*"I highly recommend this book to all lovers of Amish fiction. This isn't your run of the mill story; it is definitely set apart by the different subject matters that are brought out within the text."*

—Brandi Fitzpatrick, The Faith in Fiction Book Club, *BookFun.org*

*Courtesy of Harvest House Publishers*

## About the Authors

### Mindy Starns Clark

Mindy Starns Clark is the bestselling author of the inspirational Million Dollar Mysteries, the Smart Chick Mysteries, and three standalone mysteries, as well as the nonfiction books The House That Cleans Itself and A Pocket Guide to Amish Life. Her novels include A Penny for Your Thoughts, Don't Take Any Wooden Nickels, A Dime a Dozen, A Quarter for a Kiss, The Buck Stops Here, The Trouble with Tulip, Blind Dates Can Be Murder, Elementary, My Dear Watkins, Whispers of the Bayou, Shadows of Lancaster County, and Under the Cajun Moon. Her next mystery, Secrets of Harmony Grove, will be released in October 2010.

Mindy is also the author of numerous plays and musicals which have been performed all over the United States. She has written textbooks, articles, short stories, and more than 75 computer software manuals. Other writings appear in the anthologies *What the Wind Picked Up* (Inspirational Fiction), *Death Knell V* (Mystery Fiction), *Divine Secrets of the Yahweh Sisterhood* (Inspirational Anthology), and *A Novel Idea* (Inspirational Nonfiction).

A former singer and stand-up comedian, Mindy lives with her husband and two teenage daughters near Valley Forge, PA. She enjoys speaking to churches, civic groups, and libraries across the country. Her unique blend of humor and insight make her an audience favorite.

*Courtesy the author's website: <http://www.mindystarnsclark.com/mindy.php>*

## Leslie Gould

I live in Portland, Oregon with my husband, Peter, and our four children.

I began writing short fiction out of creative desperation when Peter was deployed to Germany with his Army Reserve medical unit during the first Gulf War.

Since high school, I'd wanted to write fiction and frequently jotted down character sketches, scenes, and unfinished stories, but I was afraid to truly try. If I failed, what would I have to dream about? When Peter was deployed, I became the single parent of a toddler and an infant. The overwhelming responsibility (and the need for a weekly escape!) inspired me to take a risk and sign up for a fiction writing class.

Acknowledgements along the way kept me writing--encouragement from teachers and writing group members, second place in the Willamette Writer's Fiction Contest, a short story in Virtue Magazine, and a semifinalist placing for a Heekin Novel in Progress Fellowship.

I grew up in the small farming community of Pomeroy, Washington and graduated with a degree in history and communications from Judson Baptist College. My past professional positions include curator of the Swedenburg House Museum in Ashland, Oregon and editor of three Northwest magazines. My own close friendships and friendships I have witnessed inspired me to write my first novel, Garden of Dreams. My second novel, Beyond the Blue, was inspired by the adoption of our youngest daughter in 2001, although it is not her story. My third novel, Scrap Everything, was also inspired by friends and family.

Fiction, by far, is my preferred medium. My ultimate goal in writing is to convey God's love, grace, and beauty. The themes of family and friendship are central to my writing. Fiction allows me to recreate emotions surrounding those relationships and to reveal truths about God and his redemptive work in our lives. Besides writing, I enjoy both teaching fiction and leading discussions about subjects included in my novels. I've presented at Oregon Christian Writers' conferences, Multnomah Bible College, Vietnamese Heritage Camp, book groups and in community settings.

My family and I enjoy soccer, traveling, backpacking, camping with friends and extended family, and laughing at the antics of our parade of pets--toy poodle Max and cats Sam-I-Am and Meo Meo ("Cat Cat" in Vietnamese).

*Courtesy the author's website: <http://www.lesliegould.com/pages/author.html>*

## Author Interview

Meet Leslie Gould, author of *The Amish Midwife*  
Courtesy of AmishReader.com

**So, Leslie, can you give us “you” in a nutshell? Try to describe your life in a paragraph (but if you need to use two paragraphs, that’s OK).**

How about three?! I’m definitely a member of the “sandwich” generation. My elderly father lives in a nearby care center, and I take him to his appointments and try to see him as much as possible. My husband, Peter, and I have four children and all are at home—the youngest is 13 and the oldest is 23. The 13-year-old plays club soccer, which means lots of practices and games and trips. I always take my laptop along and write during practice and the hour-long warm ups before games. It’s crazy but it works—every hour of writing helps get a book done!

Peter is in the Army Reserve and was just promoted to colonel, which people say makes me a general since supposedly I out rank him. The Army Reserve definitely adds another twist to my life, but a very important one. I’m proud of Peter and thankful for his service.

Besides the Lord, my family, and all the good friends that I’ve been blessed with, the thing that makes me the happiest is writing a story. I feel such harmony when I have a stretch of six or seven hours to just write. It’s pure bliss when it all comes together and the words flow. (It’s the same feeling I have when reading a good book.) Of course there are plenty of days when the words don’t flow but the interruptions (mostly self-inflicted) do—so I’m always very thankful for that sense of harmony when it does happen.

**What are your favorite things to write about, and what inspired you to write in the first place?**

I love writing about families, friendships, and other cultures—which made the leap to Amish fiction very enjoyable.

As far as my inspiration to write, I’ve always been intrigued with the process of writing and storytelling. The first word I ever wrote was “sky.” I was four and thought it was absolutely magical. I also used to make up stories about the alphabet when I was little. Each letter was a character with its own personality and there was conflict between some of them, especially those next in “line” to each other—although I don’t think I ever got as far as actual plots in those stories. By junior high and high school I was keeping a journal (oh, the drama) and writing short stories (pretty bad stuff) and poetry (really bad stuff).

After college I did PR, curated a museum in Ashland, Oregon, worked for the Port of Portland, and later was the editor of a bridal magazine, along with writing freelance articles. I enjoyed the nonfiction writing that I did in all of those jobs, but what I really wanted to do was write fiction. I’d write scenes and character sketches and had ideas for

novels, but it wasn't until Peter's unit was deployed to Germany in 1990 that I finally took a fiction writing class and started finishing short stories and working on novels.

One thing led to another...ha! Not really. One year of writing fiction led to another year of writing fiction, and although I had a couple of short stories published and I placed in a couple of competitions, it was 10 years from the time I took my first fiction writing class until I sold my first novel.

**What interested you in Amish fiction to the point that you said, "I want to write an Amish series!"?**

23 years ago when our oldest was a baby, Peter and I loaded up our VW van and the three of us took a six week road trip around the US. (Yes, we were crazy, but we didn't know it at the time—and our little guy turned out to be a good traveler, thankfully.) Peter had lived in Pennsylvania as a boy and remembered visiting Lancaster County, so that was one of our stops. We ate shoofly pie, shopped in a couple of stores, and took photos of beautiful quilts hanging on clotheslines. It was absolutely fascinating.

Fast-forward a few years. Our next two babies were born at home in Portland and I started reading everything I could about midwifery, including *A Midwife's Story* by Penny Armstrong, who was a midwife to the Amish. It became one of my favorite books and as I read it and reread it, I came became more and more fascinated with the Amish women and their stories.

When Amish fiction became big, I had an interest but didn't feel as if I had the credibility to write it. I live in Oregon. I didn't know anyone Amish. The closest experience I had was that all four of my children went to a Mennonite preschool—but it was a Montessori Mennonite preschool and certainly not anything close to Old Order. (There's no Old Order anything in Oregon, except in Hillary Manton Lodge's wonderful novels!)

**When/how did you team up with Mindy Starns Clark to write the *Women of Lancaster County* series?**

When my agent asked if I was interested in writing Amish fiction, I told him I didn't think I could pull it off. I'm a history major—I want things to be as accurate as possible, and I was afraid I wouldn't be able to get Amish fiction anywhere close to "right." But then he suggested that Mindy and I write a novel together. She lives in Pennsylvania. She'd already written Amish fiction. I thought it was a great idea! So Peter, our two girls, and I traveled to Pennsylvania for a research trip and to meet Mindy. (Who is absolutely wonderful, by the way.)

From the first Amish farm we drove by, I was absolutely hooked. I found it even more fascinating than I had 23 years before!

**What are some significant events in your life story so far?**

Being married for 27 years is one of the most significant “events” of my life. I’ve been blessed with a good man who is willing to work hard at this ongoing endeavor. We keep growing and learning and moving forward. Being a mom is also one of the most significant and challenging ongoing events of my life. I tell people that parenting and writing are two of the most humbling things there are (but also two of the most rewarding).

Another significant event was adopting our youngest child from Vietnam. I took the emotions of that experience and turned them into a fictional story, which ended up becoming my novel *Beyond the Blue*. I turned the emotions of another significant event, Peter’s Army service and the impact on our family, into the novel *Scrap Everything*. Like most writers, my significant events find their way into my writing, but some are definitely more obvious than others.

**What’s something you still hope to do someday?**

I hope to go back to Vietnam and work in an orphanage or do some other type of service there. I’m fascinated by the stories of Vietnam and have been since I was a child, and I would like nothing more than to make a contribution to the people there.

After our kids are all grown, I hope Peter and I can do short-term missionary trips to wherever God would have us go—but I do hope Vietnam is one of the places.

Just for fun...

**What’s your favorite dessert?** Crème brûlée

**Which household chore do you dislike most?** Unloading the dishwasher (yes, I would rather clean toilets and empty the cat box than unload the dishwasher—can’t explain it, but it’s true).

**What do you think you would like best and least if you were to “go Amish”?** I would definitely like the family working together the most and stopping school after the eighth grade the least.

**Do you collect anything?** Books, books, and more books! I’m basically a book-a-holic.

**What’s your favorite book?** How about my favorite story and my favorite book? My favorite story is “Jonah and the Whale.” I’ve loved it since I was little. Isn’t it a shock when the whale swallows him? Can you imagine? And then Jonah keeps on whining, even after all he’s gone through. It’s such an applicable story.

My favorite book is *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf. I first read it in college and have read it several times since. I love the domestic yet enchanting setting and the stream of consciousness writing. She was brilliant.

**Anything else that you want to tell us?** I'm very excited for the release of *The Amish Midwife*! Writing with Mindy has been a wonderful, collaborative experience. The characters are unforgettable and I love the way the plot twists and turns. I can't wait for people to read it!

*Courtesy of AmishReader.com: <http://www.amishreader.com/2010/12/14/meet-leslie-gould-author-of-the-amish-midwife/>*

## Author Interview

Kim Ford Interviews Our Featured Cover Author  
-Mindy Starns Clark

*Courtesy of Christian Fiction Online Magazine:*

**Your journey to publication was one of dedication and lots of alternate jobs from travel agent to floral delivery girl. Tell us a little about that journey and why it was so easy for you to stay dedicated to becoming published?**

Easy? No. Driven? Yes. I think I was just one of those people who was born to write and never really had any choice in the matter. Truth be told, I can't not write.

In college, I wanted to be a writer, but I wasn't sure which of my three biggest fantasies I wanted to come true first: New York Times best-selling novel, Broadway musical, or Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay. Believe it or not, I assumed that at least one of these would be a given by age twenty-five—at the very latest. Boy, did I have a lot to learn. My first year out of college working as a freelance writer, I sold exactly one article—which paid all of \$75.

Realizing that my fantasies might not happen as quickly as I had planned, I surrendered to the notion of a “regular job” and took a position as a travel agent. I needed the money, I loved to travel, and I figured as a writer it wouldn't hurt to see the world, especially at a discount. Fortunately, the work itself turned out to be a lot of fun, and the travel benefits were incredible. I continued to submit my writings on the side, but I still wasn't selling more than the occasional small piece.

In 1987, I moved to New Jersey to get married. Tired of the travel business by that point, I took a job at a computer software company, in the marketing department, where I wrote promotional materials and advertising copy, and later moving over to the technical

writing department, where I eventually wrote and/or edited more than seventy-five computer software manuals.

In my off hours I was still trying to get published, and when one of my scripts won a major contest, I decided to refocus my freelance efforts toward scriptwriting—a great decision. A couple in our church put on many of the plays I was writing. Once my scripts had been performed and refined, I began submitting them for publication in the church and school market. Much to my astonishment, I finally started getting acceptances rather than rejections!

I was about twenty-seven when I held my first published one-act play in my hands. It wasn't exactly my biggest dream come true, but it was still quite thrilling. Though my plays and musicals continued to sell, I still didn't have much luck with other kinds of writing.

When my husband and I started our family, I pushed my writing to the back burner, as much as I could. Though I dearly love being a full-time mom—and that had always been an far bigger dream of mine than being a writer—when the kids were little some days I felt like a roiling mass of pent-up creativity. God bless my husband, when he could see that happening, he would always take over on the home front and send me off alone to write. When we moved to the Philadelphia area, he encouraged me to go to writer's conferences, which ended up being absolutely essential to my future as a novelist. (If you want to be a writer, get yourself to a good writer's conference.)

Money was tight in those early years, so once the kids were in school, I took my share of part-time work to help pay the bills. That's where the delivery jobs came in. Still freelance writing in my spare time, I used the skills I was learning at conferences to try my hand at several "practice" novels. Each one was a little better than the one before, but none of them were good enough to publish.

Back then, I had never heard of Christian fiction. All I knew was that the lead characters in these practice novels were falling flat, and deep inside I began to wonder if that was because I hadn't included any spiritual components with their characterizations. God was at the center of my life; couldn't He be at the center of my heroines' lives as well? I decided to give it a shot, even though I hadn't a clue whether I would ever be able to sell such a thing or not.

Once I included Him in my work, He began moving mountains! Creatively, I felt like I was on fire, and by the time I had finished that manuscript, *A Penny for Your Thoughts*, I thought it was good enough to try to sell.

Sure enough, *A Penny for Your Thoughts*—number one in a five-book series called the *Million Dollar Mysteries*—ended up being my very first published novel. It came out twenty years after I'd graduated from college. Though it certainly hadn't been easy to continue writing for such a long time, in retrospect I wouldn't change even a single

minute of my journey. God had His hand on all of it, and even now I'm still finding new ways that He continues to redeem that time.

**Your books are primarily mysteries, but you have also published nonfiction titles. How do you switch genres so easily? Which is your favorite? Most satisfying?**

Writing fiction is fun but incredibly difficult, while writing nonfiction is easy but after a while can become tedious. That's why I love being able to switch back and forth between the two. Sometimes I just can't write another novel. So I'll do a nonfiction—and have a great time doing it—but when it's finished I'm tired of it and ready for fiction again. The two types of writing really do pull from the opposite sides of my brain, so it's nice to alternate once in a while, much like cross-training for an athlete.

**How does writing plays and musicals differ from novel writing? How did you learn the craft?**

The “pre-work,” if you will, of laying out the plot and the characters for a play is much the same as that for a novel. But when it comes to the writing, it's very different. For me, playwriting is far easier, as if the lines jump straight from my brain to the page. I can pump out the rough draft of a play in far less time than I could write the same number of words in a novel format. Not sure why that is. Bizarre, huh?

**You have recently begun a series set in the Amish community, another switch in genre. Tell us how the idea for this series was born.**

We live in Pennsylvania not too far from Lancaster County and have visited the area for years. I was always curious about the Amish, and eventually I found myself wanting to explore their world through fiction. When pitching some new mystery novel ideas, I included one set in Amish country. My publisher loved the idea, and that book became *Shadows of Lancaster County*, my first Amish-related mystery.

My brain was ready for a break from fiction by then, so with some trepidation, I agreed to give it a try. I took a far more personal approach, slowly getting to know members of the Amish community and learning from them firsthand. Not only did I meet some delightful people, but I developed a tremendous respect for their faith walk. In the end, writing *A Pocket Guide to Amish Life* was both deeply rewarding and great fun. By the time it was finished, I felt much more confident in my knowledge of the Amish and ready to write more about them in fiction and nonfiction.

In college, I took classes on many different types of writing (short stories, poetry, etc.), but my university did not have a single class on playwriting, despite the fact that they had a thriving theater department. In my senior year, I complained to the dean, and much to my surprise he offered to let me create my own course in the subject. In the end, I was given a textbook on playwriting, a syllabus, and three professors! One was an expert in directing, one in set design, and one in acting. Alternating between the three, I met with

one of them each week for a semester, doing my assignments and working through the textbook between teaching sessions. My final exam was to turn in a full-length play. I'll always be grateful to Clemson University for agreeing to accommodate me in that way, and to the three professors who so generously worked with me to teach me their craft.

**Can you tell us about your latest project? What about it excites you most?**

I am having so much fun with this new series, *The Women of Lancaster County*. Book one, *The Amish Midwife*, is my first non-mystery fiction, cowritten with Leslie Gould.

We're both really pleased with how *The Amish Midwife* turned out, and we've just finished putting the final touches on the next book in the series, *The Amish Nanny*, which will be released in July. After two books, I guess you could say we've become somewhat of a lean, mean writing machine. It's a real hoot, some of the most enjoyable work I've ever done. I never thought of writing as a lonely profession, but once

I got a coauthor I discovered what a pleasure it was to have someone going through it along with me, step by step, sharing both the burdens and the joys.

Speaking of joys, Leslie and I got some big news yesterday when we found out that that *The Amish Midwife* is currently #1 on the ECPA best-seller list! So I guess you could say that what excites me most is that people seem to enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed writing it. That's incredibly rewarding.

**You are the mother of two daughters. Do either of them share your love for writing? What do they think of your books?**

Emily is a junior in college with a double major in English and theology. She is an amazing writer, far better than I was at her age, and a very gifted editor as well. She tutors students in the college's writing lab, works as a proofreader for the school newspaper, and is a writing fellow for the communications department. Yet she's not nearly as ambitious as I was and has no big dreams of penning best-selling novels or Broadway musicals or Oscar-winning screenplays. She may end up doing all three, of course, but she isn't driven like I was.

Lauren is a freshman in college, hasn't yet declared a major, but seems more interested in business or science than in English. She's an excellent writer, especially in factual or journalistic-type endeavors, but she doesn't enjoy the process of writing at all, especially not fiction. Weaving a story with words is definitely not her idea of a good time! Still, she's a great source of help for my writing, frequently providing me with character names, opening sentences, or whatever other little things I ask for her input on.

Lauren enjoys reading my books and gives me incredibly helpful feedback after each one. Emily, on the other hand, has a hard time reading them at all—not because she doesn't like them but because she can't seem to separate my stories from me.

**What is the most exciting thing God has taught you as you follow Him in your writing career?**

First, absolutely nothing along the way was wasted because He can use it all. Hindsight is 20/20, of course, but when I look back at my life and all of the various jobs I had along the way, I can see how He has used every single one of them to help my current career.

Second, the more I can take myself out of the picture, the more He can use me. When I surrendered my heroines to Him, He blessed me with publication. When I started surrendering my entire books to Him, He blessed me with a widening audience. It may have taken a long time to get here, but I am thankful that none of this happened the way I wanted it to! God's timing really is the best timing. After all, only He can see the "big picture" of our lives. Only He knows what we truly need, exactly when we need it.

Even now, it seems the more I surrender the more I receive—though often in ways I didn't expect at all. And isn't that how He always works? I'd always thought the most exciting thing in the world would be to have a best seller, when in fact it is far more thrilling to hear from a reader whose life has been impacted in some way because of something I wrote. Having a Broadway musical would be a kick, but no way could that ever compare with the deeply rewarding relationships I have developed within the Christian publishing industry. And there's no award in the world—not even an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay—that could begin to feel as good as the sweet look of pride on my husband's face when he interacts with my fans, or the tears in my daughter's eyes when she finishes one of my books and says how much it moved her. What God had in mind for me was far better than anything I ever could have envisioned. I just had to get out of the way in order to realize it.

**Do you have any words of encouragement you'd like to share with others who are on their own journey to publication?**

Stick with it, hone your craft, and be patient—but most of all surrender your talents to Him. Work hard at learning and improving and giving your very best effort, but trust Him to take your writing exactly where He wants it to go, in the timing that He desires for you. Truly, what He has in mind for you is way better than anything you could ever dream up for yourself. I'm so glad I finally figured that out, even if I did have to learn it the hard way.

Courtesy of *Christian Fiction Online Magazine*:  
[http://www.christianfictiononlinemagazine.com/apr-11-best\\_interview.html](http://www.christianfictiononlinemagazine.com/apr-11-best_interview.html)

## Discussion Questions

1. Lexie is surprised to find that her father withheld parts of her adoption story. What was her father's motive? Do you think he was right or wrong in doing so?
2. What role does Sophie play in Lexie's life? Does Sophie reveal too little information about the past to Lexie? Or too much?
3. According to the Benchmark Adoption Survey (1997), sixty percent of Americans have a personal experience with adoption, meaning that they, a family member, or a close friend was adopted, adopted a child or relinquished a child for adoption. Many other Americans have an indirect connection. Do you have a connection to adoption? If so, what is it? Has this story changed the way you view adoption?
4. Lexie has a long-standing fantasy about her birth family. How did her fantasy help her through the years of not knowing the truth about her past? Have you ever held onto a childhood fantasy or known someone who has? What were the benefits? What was the harm?
5. How does Lexie's Mennonite community in Oregon compare to the Amish community she encounters in Pennsylvania? What does she find attractive about the Amish? What do you find attractive about the Amish?
6. Who is Marta trying to protect by not being forthright with Lexie? Why does Marta think it's better to leave the past alone? What does Marta have to lose if the truth is discovered?
7. The Amish practice of "letting be" is at odds with the individualism central to most modern cultures. When do you think Christians should "let things be" and when do you think they should be more proactive?
8. James tells Lexie there is no shame for her in her story. Is there an area in your life that you have experienced false shame? How did you overcome it?

9. Lexie finds comfort in Psalm 139:16. Is there a particular verse that has brought you comfort? What is it and why?
10. Lexie is intrigued with both the word “kinship” and its concept. Have you found kinship in any unexpected places? What impact has it had on your life?

*Courtesy of Harvest House Publishers*