

# **Angel Sister**

**by Ann H. Gabhart**

## About the Book

It is 1936 and Kate Merritt is trying hard to keep her family together. Her father has slipped into alcoholism, her mother tries to come to grips with their dire financial situation, and her sisters seem to remain blissfully oblivious to all of it. Kate could never have imagined that a dirty, abandoned little girl named Lorena Birdsong would be just what her family needs.

In this richly textured novel, award-winning author Ann H. Gabhart reveals the power of true love, the freedom of forgiveness, and the strength to persevere through troubled times, all against the backdrop of a sultry Kentucky summer.

## Praise for the Book

"What a jewel of a story. Reminded me of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Like a Kentucky summer, *Angel Sister* starts slow and easy but by the end, roars along, leaving the reader breathless and wanting more."

—Lauraine Snelling, author of the Red River series, *Daughters of Blessing*, and *One Perfect Day*

*Courtesy of Revell Books*

## About the Author

Title: Ann H. Gabhart

Known As: Gabhart, Ann Houchin; Gabhart, Ann; Gabhart, Ann H.

American Novelist ( 1947 - )

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### PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Born 1947, in KY; married Darrell Gabhart (a singer); children: Johnson, Tarasa, Daniel.

Education: High school diploma. Addresses: Home: KY. E-mail:

anngabhart@bellsouth.net.

### CAREER:

Writer; also raises beef cattle on a farm in Kentucky.

### WORKS:

### WRITINGS:

### NOVELS

- *A Forbidden Yearning*, Warner Books (New York, NY), 1978.
- *A Heart Divided*, Warner Books (New York, NY), 1980.
- *Wish Come True*, Avon Flare (New York, NY), 1988.
- *Only in Sunshine*, Avon Flare (New York, NY), 1989.
- *For Sheila*, Avon Books (New York, NY), 1991.
- *Discovery at Coyote Point*, Avon Camelot (New York, NY), 1991.
- *Two of a Kind*, Avon Camelot (New York, NY), 1992.
- *Bridge to Courage*, Avon Flare (New York, NY), 1993.
- *Secrets to Tell*, Avon Flare (New York, NY), 1994.
- *Angel Sister: A Novel*, Revel (Grand Rapids, MI), 2011.
- *The Blessed: A Novel*, Revell (Grand Rapids, MI), 2011.

## "HOLLYHILL" NOVEL SERIES

- *The Scent of Lilacs*, Revell Books (Grand Rapids, MI), 2005.
- *Orchard of Hope* (sequel to *The Scent of Lilacs*), Revell Books (Grand Rapids, MI), 2007.
- *Summer of Joy*, Revell Books (Grand Rapids, MI), 2008.

## "SHAKER" NOVEL SERIES

- *The Outsider*, Revell (Grand Rapids, MI), 2008.
- *The Believer*, Revell (Grand Rapids, MI), 2009.
- *The Seeker*, Revell (Grand Rapids, MI), 2010.

## "FIRST LOVE" NOVEL SERIES

- *The Look of Eagles*, Silhouette (New York, NY), 1986.
- *A Chance Hero*, Silhouette (New York, NY), 1987.

## "CROSSWINDS" NOVEL SERIES

- *A Kindred Spirit*, Harlequin (New York, NY), 1987.
- *The Gifting*, Harlequin (New York, NY), 1987.

## NONFICTION

- *Angels at the Crossroads: Jerry Shepherd's Story of Redemption and Love* (biography), iUniverse (Lincoln, NE), 2006.

Contributor to periodicals, including *HomeLife*.

## Sidelights

Ann H. Gabhart is the author of the novel *The Scent of Lilacs* and its sequel, *Orchard of Hope*, among many other inspirational novels. Gabhart told *Christianbook.com* interviewer Dianne Burnett: "I want to inspire people to step into the sunshine of the Lord's love and to realize the Lord is always there for us, the same today as he was yesterday and as he will be tomorrow. I want people to read my stories and feel the joy of Christian living."

Set in Hollyhill, Kentucky, *The Scent of Lilacs* concerns Jocie Brooke, a thirteen-year-old living with her father, David, a newspaper editor and the interim pastor at Mt. Pleasant Church. Still haunted by the memories of his wife, who left him seven years earlier, David also cares for Jocie's Aunt Love, an elderly spinster who suffers from dementia.

When Jocie begins investigating her family's history, she uncovers some startling secrets. "Young women will identify with Jocie's small-town adventures," noted *Booklist* contributor John Mort.

In *Orchard of Hope*, set during the summer of 1964, Jocie makes friends with Noah Hearndon, an African American teen who has moved into town with his family. Hoping to start an orchard on the outskirts of Hollyhill, the Hearndons must deal with a drought that has gripped the region, and they face racism when it is announced that the local schools will desegregate.

In *Summer of Joy*, David has proposed to Leigh, and the wedding plans are under way in Hollyhill, Kentucky. Two people show up in town and threaten to cause upheaval in the lives of David and his family. A contributor to *Internet Bookwatch* deemed the series finale a "deftly written and intriguing story."

In 2008, Gabhart started the "Shaker" series of romance novels. The first installment, *The Outsider*, is set in the Pleasant Hill, Kentucky, Shaker community in 1807. Gabrielle Hope is a young woman who has visions of the future. She fears the gift because it often portends tragedies, one in particular that will challenge her faith and loyalty to the Shakers, as she falls in love with an outsider as a result of a vision. Despite feeling that "the romance never tingles" and "the novel's darker scenes of suicide and military execution are emotionally flat," a contributor to *Publishers Weekly* still recommended the book. In *Library Journal*, Tamara Butler commended the "appealing heroine" and "intriguing plot" of *The Outsider*.

*The Believer*, set in the Shaker community of Harmony Hill, features Elizabeth Duncan, who has been left to raise her siblings after the death of their parents. With nowhere else to turn, she presents the family to the Shakers. As she struggles with the new beliefs and hard work, she finds herself attracted to Ethan, a believer. Their feelings cause turmoil in him and may force one of them to leave the village. "On balance, the book rings with researched authenticity and will appeal to Amish romance fans," concluded a contributor to *Publishers Weekly*.

The third novel in the series, *The Seeker*, finds Charlotte Vance dumbfounded when her fiancé decides to become a Shaker, a religious sect that prohibits marriage. Then her father, a rich southern plantation owner, brings home a new wife, who is about Charlotte's age. Fed up with life and the impending Civil War, Charlotte joins the Harmony Hill community in a calculated plan to win back her husband-to-be. Lynne Welch, in a *Booklist* review, pointed out that this novel is "recommended for Civil War buffs and Shaker aficionados." In *Library Journal*, Nanci Milone Hill praised the book for "its even pacing, in-depth characterizations, and redemptive story."

While Gabhart has published a number of young-adult novels and historical romances, she has also written a biography. *Angels at the Crossroads: Jerry Shepherd's Story of Redemption and Love* tells of a troubled man who devoted his life to God while serving a life sentence in prison.

"Jerry's story has some dark moments," Gabhart admitted to *Reader Views* Web site contributor Debra Gaynor. "I had to get inside his skin and go down those painful roads with him in order to write the story, so I'm not sure I could say I enjoyed those parts at all. However, it was great to walk out of those dark valleys with Jerry and back into the sunshine of his realization of the Lord's love and rejoice with him in his second chance at life."

Gabhart Told CA: "I've been writing ever since I was ten and got hooked on reading. I decided then that I wanted to be the person who wrote the words down in some of those books.

"The last few books I've written have been inspirational stories, and I've gone back and used things I remember from when I grew up and from the stories my mother and my aunts tell me about their younger years. I enjoy thinking about how things used to be and realizing that although some things change, the joys and sorrows people have in their lives are much the same from one generation to the next.

"I work on a computer. I started out writing in wire-bound notebooks. I graduated to a manual typewriter and then an electric model and finally a word processor. I sometimes miss the paper trail, but the word processor saves a lot of typing over. I usually start with my characters and say what if this or that person did this or that. The story grows from that. However, I have written one story based on a certain setting and it turned out well. I fit my characters into the setting.

"I suppose the most surprising thing is that something I want to do so much and have always wanted to do--write--is still such hard work. Sometimes I feel like I'm having to dig the words out of my head.

"It's hard to pick a favorite. I loved my book *Discovery at Coyote Point* because it was about a favorite place of mine and was well received by my young readers. I had a lot of teachers read it aloud to their students and then the students wrote me letters. So that was fun. I also really enjoyed my 'Hollyhill' series--*The Scent of Lilacs*, *Orchard of Hope*, and *Summer of Joy*. Jocie and her family were such fun characters.

"I want my books to make people smile and fall in love with my characters. I hope my young adult books will make young readers want to read more books and develop a lifelong love of reading. I hope my stories inspire my readers to look for the joy in life."

## FURTHER READINGS:

## FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

### PERIODICALS

- *Booklist*, October 1, 2005, John Mort, review of *The Scent of Lilacs*, p. 24; June 1, 2010, Lynne Welch, review of *The Seeker*, p. 45.
- *Internet Bookwatch*, May, 2008, review of *Summer of Joy*.
- *Library Journal*, June 1, 2008, Tamara Butler, "Christian Fiction," p. 84; June 15, 2010, Nanci Milone Hill, review of "Summer Blockbusters," p. 52.
- *Publishers Weekly*, January 4, 1993, review of *Bridge to Courage*, p. 74; June 2, 2008, review of *The Outsider*, p. 31; June 8, 2009, review of *The Believer*, p. 29.

### ONLINE

- *Ann H. Gabhart Home Page*, <http://www.annhgabhart.com> (May 25, 2011).
- *Ann H. Gabhart: One Writer's Journal*, <http://annhgabhart.blogspot.com> (May 25, 2011).
- *Christianbook.com*, <http://www.christianbook.com/> (July 10, 2007), Dianne Burnett, "Our Interview with Ann Gabhart."
- *Reader Views*, <http://www.readerviews.com/> (July 30, 2007), Juanita Watson, "Interview with Ann H. Gabhart," and Debra Gaynor, review of *Angels at the Crossroads: Jerry Shepherd's Story of Redemption and Love*. \*

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## Author Interview

*Our Interview with Ann Gabhart*  
From [Christianbook.com](http://Christianbook.com)

### **Please tell us a bit about yourself.**

I grew up on a farm in Kentucky and still live on a farm today. I love the country and can't imagine living anywhere else. When I was about ten, I started writing just because I loved putting words together to tell a story. I've put lots of those words together now and have been blessed to have twenty of my books published, some in the secular market and the last seven in the inspirational market. I'm married to a bass singer who loves singing gospel music the way I love writing. We have three children and nine grandchildren I enjoy spoiling as only a grandma can. I attend a small country church where everybody is like family. I enjoy walking in the woods with my three dogs and meeting and talking to people who love books. Well, I like talking to most everybody, but I especially like talking books with friends.

### **What is your favorite Bible verse?**

It's hard to pick only one. I often say John 21:25 just because it awakens my imagination to the untold stories of the Lord's love and power. But then there is Mark 9:23. Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." (NKJ) That has to be a favorite.

### **How did you get started writing Christian fiction?**

Warner Books published my first novel, a historical romance, in 1978. Another historical romance followed that one, but the next books I wrote didn't fit into the genre's market trends at that time. I turned to young adult fiction and had eleven books published by various companies for young readers. Then about ten years ago I hit a rejection wall and wrote several books that never found a loving editor. In the midst of discouragement I decided to write a hopeful story about a preacher and his family set in the mid '60s in small town America – the very sort of town where I grew up. That story became *The Scent of Lilacs* and found a loving editor, Lonnie Hull DuPont at Revell Books. I've been writing for the Christian fiction market ever since, and I'm so glad the Lord pushed me through that door even if it did take several years of rejected writing for me to pay attention. I love writing inspirational fiction.

### **What inspired your interest in writing Angel Sister?**

Angel Sister is a story of my heart. The setting and concept are loosely based on my mom's growing up years. She and her three sisters always had so much fun talking about their childhood and the collection of odd neighbors who lived in their little community that I wanted to go back in time with them and bring some of that to life in my story.

### **How did you come up with the concept for Angel Sister?**

That's not an easy question for me to answer. Generally I have this tiny seed of an idea and then I say, "What if?" In this book, I had my mom's stories from her childhood as the seed of the idea. Then I took that seed and planted it in my imagination and said, "What if I had a young girl who felt as if she had to be the one to hold her family together? What if her father had a drinking problem that was threatening to tear apart her family? What if a little girl is deserted on the church steps?" These were some of my beginning what if questions and from there the story seed grew and was watered with the theme of forgiveness that runs through the book.

### **How much of Angel Sister is factual?**

My mother was one of four sisters. My grandfather was a blacksmith and served in World War I and my grandmother did love to read. There was an odd lady in their neighborhood who did chop down cedar trees to make cedar palaces. So their stories and experiences were the germ of the idea that eventually grew into my fictional story.

### **How closely is Angel Sister based on your life experiences?**

The book isn't based on my life experiences, but rather my mother's. I do have two sisters, so I know how sisters can sometimes get at odds even while they love one another. I can also identify with the rural feel of the story since I grew up in the country and had some of the same sort of experiences that Kate has in the story – picking wild raspberries and canning beans, walking in the woods, that sort of thing.

### **How long did Angel Sister take you to complete?**

It took me about a year to write Angel Sister from initial idea to ready to send off to my editor. That's usually how long it takes me to write a book, but I have written two books in a year a few times.

**Do you have a favorite character in Angel Sister? Why?**

Definitely Kate. She's fourteen and the middle sister, the one who has to make sure the family survives. She is so full of love and so strong and yet at the same time so vulnerable when life starts throwing her curves. If that's not enough reason, she's the character based on what I thought my mother might have been like when she was that age. But I also got very close to Kate's father, Victor, while I was writing as he struggled with his demons. And you have to love five-year-old Lorena as she tries to hold on to her identity by standing up and shouting, "My name is Lorena Birdsong."

**How much research did Angel Sister take?**

Some of the research for the background setting had been going on for years as I listened to my mother and aunts talk about growing up in the 1930's. But when I decided to include the World War I romance of the parents in the book, I had to do a lot of research to get the right historical background for that part of the story. I also did research on blacksmithing and the poetry and stories Nadine was so entranced with in the early 1900's.

**What was the most interesting tidbit that you learned while writing Angel Sister?**

I learned so much about the first World War. Perhaps the most interesting thing was that the men who volunteered to cross the ocean and fight in that war thought it would be the war that would end all wars. How sad that did not turn out to be true.

**What are some of the challenges you face as an author?**

My biggest challenge is enough time to do everything. I want to write. I have to write. Still, it's easy to do everything but write at times. I've got grandbabies to enjoy, a mother in poor health who needs my help, church activities and volunteer duties, book events, friends and family to keep up with on Facebook, great books to read, and a house that has to be swept out occasionally. You know what I mean. We all want to dip out too much on our plates. So I have to make sure I set goals and put my fingers on that keyboard on a regular basis.

**What aspects of being a writer do you enjoy the most?**

I like coming up with new characters who come to life in my imagination and begin telling me their stories. And then I get to write it all down. Actually I like most aspects of writing. I don't even mind editing – most of the time. Of course one of the best things about being a published writer is being able to share my stories with readers.

**What is your writing style? (Do you outline? Write “by-the-seat-of-your-pants? Or somewhere in-between?)**

I'm probably somewhere in between. I don't outline, but I do research the historical background and events. I do pre-writing about my characters to get to know them really well before I type the first word of Chapter 1. But then I let the story carry me along and sometimes events or even new characters pop into the story that I had no idea were going to show up. That's always exciting.

**Do your characters begin to take on a life of their own as you write?**

Definitely. They talk and breathe and get very stubborn if I try to make them do something they would never do.

**What other new projects do you have on the horizon?**

My fourth Shaker book, *The Blessed*, will be released next summer. It's written and going through the process of edits and cover design, etc.

I also have a book tentatively titled, *Words of Fire*, about Louisville in the 1850's that is surprisingly relevant to some of the issues of today. At that time many Irish and German immigrants were coming to America and political parties were being formed to keep immigrants from being elected to office. Election riots broke out in many cities including Louisville. That's the historical background for the very personal story and romance of my characters, both newspaper reporters. It has a tentative release date in 2012.

Also Revell plans to repackage my Hollyhill books and release them as a set sometime in the future. My actual work in progress is my fifth Shaker novel and that will be followed by a Shaker Christmas novella.

**What message would you like your readers to take from *Angel Sister*?**

That hope can come from forgiveness. And that if a family has love they have what they need especially if each person in that family looks to the Lord for help when troubles come.

**What is your greatest achievement?**

Always first and foremost, my three beautiful children.

But if we're talking about writing achievements, I would say switching genres three times and ending up writing stories I love that have a Christian background or element. Also, my book, *The Outsider*, was a finalist for the 2009 ECPA Gold Medallion Book of the Year in the fiction category. That was definitely a professional high.

**What is your goal or mission as a writer?**

I want to entertain my readers with stories about characters they can invite into their hearts and get to know like family. It's such a bonus to hear from a reader who has been inspired by one of my stories to begin a closer walk with the Lord.

**What do you do to get away from it all?**

What else? Read. Or take a walk with my dogs. Or play with the grandkids.

**Is there anything else you'd like to add?**

I am ever grateful to the readers who pick up my books and give my stories a chance. I enjoy making reading friends and I hope to write many more stories. That's all I've ever wanted to do – make up stories and write them down. I think the Lord planted that desire in me and then blessed me with the gift of words. Thanks to you readers, I'm living my dream.

*Courtesy of Christianbook.com, Retrieved January 24, 2012, from  
[http://www.christianbook.com/Christian/Books/cms\\_content/1274771414?page=1138266&event=PR](http://www.christianbook.com/Christian/Books/cms_content/1274771414?page=1138266&event=PR)*

## Discussion Questions

Reading Group Guide for  
*Angel Sister*  
By Ann H Gabhart

1. *Angel Sister* is set in 1936 during the Great Depression. Do you see similarities with today's economic hard times? What are the major differences?
2. Kate thinks of herself as the responsible sister and wants to take care of her family. Why do you think she feels this way? Did you ever feel this way while you were growing up—as if it were up to you to make everything right in your family? Do you think that's a common feeling for some children?
3. Victor loves Nadine and his girls desperately and yet he kept giving in to the temptation to drink even though his drinking was threatening to destroy his family life. Why do you think he couldn't resist the temptation? Do you believe the Lord can free people of addictive habits if they give them over to him in prayer? Have you known this (the Lord taking away an addiction) to happen to anyone you know?
4. Nadine has a strong, unquestioning faith in the Lord. How do you think that helped her endure her father's harsh attitude and actions? Do you think her life would have been a great deal different if she hadn't gone back to Rosey Corner after Victor left to fight the war in France?
5. Lorena's parents desert her on the church steps. Do you think her mother left her there out of love because she truly trusted the Lord to send someone to take care of Lorena? Can you imagine being so desperately poor that you might consider giving up a child if you thought the child would be better off?
6. Kate wants more than anything to be Lorena's angel sister and take care of the little girl. When Grandfather Merritt takes the child from her, she tells her father she no longer believes there is a God. Have you ever been so disappointed and hurt that you turned away from the Lord?
7. Lorena's name is her connection to her past and her way of remembering her family. Do you think she kept saying "My name is Lorena Birdsong" or do you think after a while she no longer had the need to declare her name every night? How did you feel in the story when Kate, Lorena, and Graham shouted their names after the fire? Did it make you want to shout out your name too?
8. Why do you think Ella Baxter wanted to adopt Lorena when it was obvious she didn't like children? Do you think in that day and time a childless woman had a stigma on her?

9. Victor never felt loved by his father. Why do you think his father was so hard on him? Do you think Nadine was right when she told Victor to forgive his father? Do you think Victor was a more loving father to his daughters because his own father was so cold toward him?
10. Why do you think Graham and Fern lived the way they did? Do you think without the responsibility of taking care of Fern, Graham would have lived a different life? Do you think Fern was mentally ill or simply closed off from the world because that was how she coped with the bad happenings in her life?
11. Aunt Hattie knew the Lord and she knew the people of Rosey Corner. Why do you think she was unable to stand up to Preston Merritt when she seemed to have no problem with anybody else?
12. Kate asked Grandfather Reece and her mother if they believed in guardian angels. Do you believe in guardian angels?

*Courtesy of Revell Books*