

Home Another Way

by Christa Parrish

About the Book

Sarah Graham is living life hard and fast-and she is flat broke. When her estranged father dies, she travels to the tiny mountain hamlet of Jonah, New York, to claim her inheritance. Once there, however, she learns that her plans for the future-and her memories of the past-are about to change forever.

Christa Parrish's debut novel is a captivating story of a broken, isolated woman and the flawed, faithful people who help her forgive and find peace.

Praise for the Book

“The People of Jonah are flawed and complicated, and Parrish allows readers to savor every moment of genuine hard-earned human connection. With its vast array of richly imagined characters, its humor and its substance, this debut is sure to resonate with a wide and appreciative audience.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“There’s a bit of Sarah Graham in each of us: angry, defensive, and flat-out scared. In *Home Another Way*, Christa Parrish takes Sarah up a mountain and through a desert. Her fresh, direct voice draws us in, and gives us hope that we too can learn to listen and forgive. Leave room on your bookshelf. We’ll be hearing a lot more from Christa—and loving every word.”

—*Melanie Rigney—Writer’s Digest magazine, former editor*

Courtesy of Bethany House

About the Author

About Christa

Christa Parrish graduated high school at 16, with every intention of becoming a surgeon. After college, however, her love of all things creative led her in another direction, and she worked in both theatre and journalism.

A winner of Associated Press awards for her reporting, Christa gave up her career after the birth of her son, Jacob. She continued to write from home, doing *pro bono* work for the New York Family Policy Council, where her articles appeared in Focus on the Family's Citizen magazine. She was also a finalist in World magazine's WORLDview short story contest, sponsored by WestBow press. She now teaches literature and writing to high school students, is a homeschool mom, and lives with her family in upstate New York, where she is at work on her second novel.

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Author Interview

Bethany House

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Questions and Answers with Christa Parrish

1. Sarah Graham, your protagonist, has a rather rough personality. Why did you choose to have her be a gifted classical violinist, a talent many would consider refined and elegant?

Often times, in life, we're surprised when someone we think of as coarse and common has an exceptional ability, a trait that's extraordinary. But we shouldn't be. God isn't a respecter of persons, He doesn't dole out His graces based on appearance or wealth or intelligence, on anything that comes of our own merit. Those unexpected gifts help us to see a person as someone God loves, rather than, as in Sarah's case, just some selfish, unhappy woman.

2. That's a thread that runs through *Home Another Way*, isn't it? That people can't be placed into neat, little boxes?

Absolutely. In the novel, each character has his or her strengths and weaknesses. Some are more obvious than others. As sinful people, we tend to judge others on things that matter so little in God's eyes—weight, income, physical disability, cognitive ability. We also can have little patience for those, like Sarah, who carry the burdens of past sorrows. Underneath all those things, however, is someone God loves. We need to remember that.

3. Much of the story is narrated in first person by Sarah, but you also have portions that are told in third person describing the more private side of the other characters' lives. Why did you choose to use two different perspectives in the novel?

Initially, I began writing the novel in first-person, but after a number of chapters, I realized the reader needed to see Sarah through eyes other than her own; her bitterness and self-loathing needed to be tempered with the potential others saw in her. I rewrote the beginning of the novel in third-person, adding in the chapters by the secondary characters—Jack, Maggie, Memory, Beth—but it still wasn't right. Sarah's unique voice had been swallowed by the change in point of view. I decided to keep Sarah's chapters in first-person, and the other chapters in third-person. The result allows readers to have deeper insight into both Sarah and the people who want to love her, fully faceting the novel.

4. We receive in *Home Another Way* such a vast range of complex and interesting characters. Can you tell us about your favorites, and what inspired you to bring them to life?

I honestly don't have favorites, but I do like each one for different reasons—mostly because they have characteristics I wish I had. Beth Watson has a gentle faithfulness I don't think I'll ever be able to muster, and Memory Jones is completely comfortable in her own skin. Jack Watson keeps on doing the work he's called to do, despite his discouragement, and his mother, Maggie,

doesn't let her pain stop her from serving. And Sarah, even in her bitterness, shows a tenacious desire to persevere, even if it is for the wrong reasons at the beginning of the book. They are a foot, a hand, an ear, an eye—a Body—each unique for a purpose, each filling a necessary role in the Kingdom.

5. What do you hope the reader takes away from this novel?

One of my passions is to see the church acting like the Church, and I wanted to show this in *Home Another Way*. As Christians, we can't let excuses—even good, valid excuses—keep us from doing what we're called to do for both one another and “the least of these.” Many of the characters in this book could plead, “Well, I can't do this, Lord, because I'm a sinner,” or, “Sorry, Lord, I have my own problems.” But they understand God uses His flawed, faithful people to bring His purposes to pass.

6. What does “Home Another Way” mean in relation to the story?

Psalm 68:5-6a states, “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families.” Home, in this case, is two-fold. First, Sarah finds an earthly, temporal home with the inhabitants of Jonah—not a place to live, but the loving, trusting relationships she'd never had before. But, home—true home, where we all find our perfect security—is knowing God intimately, and Sarah also begins to understand this in ways she could not have imagined.

7. Describe for us your writing process.

I like to think of my novels as little, self-contained independent films. Before writing, I play my scenes in my head, watching them, a bit grainy and shaky, hearing the rhythm of the dialogue and feeling the pace of the action. I write what I see, and if something doesn't ring true, I highlight it, and rework it later. I also need to ruminate for days, sometimes longer, on a particular chapter. Because of this, I don't always write linearly, and my manuscript is marked with strings of capital Xs in places that I need to add things, and highlighted in various colors, depending on the editing needs of certain scenes.

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http://www.bethanyhouse.com/Media/MediaManager/HomeAnotherWay_QUES_0.pdf

Discussion Questions

1. Sarah Graham has a rather rough personality, yet she's also been gifted with immense musical talent. Does this seem like a contradiction? Why does God bestow his mercies on those who seem not to "deserve" them, both in general, and particularly in Sarah's situation?
2. Have there been times you've encountered people who, like Sarah, have been wounded in life? How have you responded to them? Does knowing about their past hardships help you be more compassionate towards them? Would you have given Sarah as many chances as the people of Jonah did?
3. Sarah is quick to judge people, and at Thanksgiving, she's surprised when Memory doesn't eat dessert. "I'm fat for sure," Memory tells her, "but that don't make me a pig." As sinful people, we all judge others on things that matter so little in God's eyes - weight, income, physical disability, cognitive ability. What are some ways you, personally, strive to overcome this tendency?
4. When do you think Sarah begins to truly change? What causes her to do so?
5. Much of the story is narrated in first person by Sarah, but there are also chapters written in third person from the point of view of Jack, Maggie, Beth, and Memory. Is anything gained by the novel being formatted this way? How would the book differ if it were only written from Sarah's perspective?
6. What character would you most like to have in your life? Which one least? Think about the character you'd least likely want in your own life. Why is that? Is it a valid reason?
7. Memory tells Sarah, "Ain't nothing to do with good or bad. You just ain't whole enough yet." Do Christians judge people's actions in regard to "good" or "bad?" Should they? What does it mean to be "whole"?
8. How did you react when you learned of Jack's failing? When Sarah first hears of it, she thinks, He was no better than me. Do you ever react with relief at the sins of those around you? What did you think of the other townsfolk's reactions? Do Christians hold those in authority to a higher standard? Should they?
9. Many of the people in Jonah have secrets. Jack, initially angry with Sarah for telling his, comes to liken his pain to the "glaring white spotlight upon him, burning the skin off a man who'd been hiding in the dark too long." What does this mean, and have you ever felt this way? How do secrets impact the lives of others in the novel? How have they impacted your own life?

10. Throughout the novel, many people try to come alongside Sarah. Who are some of these characters, and why do they want to help her? Are their motives right or wrong? Does it matter? Is Sarah also valuable in the lives of others? Has God ever used someone you were trying to "help" to help you?
11. After Doc tells Sarah about her parents, she's not satisfied with the answers. Doc says, "Sometimes not enough has to be enough." Has there been a time in your life when you had to settle for "not enough"? How did you handle it?
12. What did you think of the end of the novel? Were you hoping for a different ending? Think about Sarah as the story concluded. Could it have ended differently and still stayed true to her character?

Courtesy Bethany House