

A young boy is walking past a rough stone wall. He is wearing a dark flat cap, a light-colored button-down shirt, a dark overcoat, and dark boots. His right arm is extended, touching the stone wall. The background is a blurred street scene.

AMY K. SORRELLS

THEN
SINGS
MY SOUL
~ A NOVEL ~

Praise for Amy K. Sorrells

Then Sings My Soul

“Flashing back between the present and [the] past, Sorrells stitches together a beautiful story of family and belief that illustrates the importance of closure and the peace derived from faith. Recommended for readers interested in realistic fiction in the style of Kate Breslin, Kristy Cambron, and Chris Bohjalian.”

LIBRARY JOURNAL

“*Then Sings My Soul* is the most phenomenal and heartrending story I have ever read. This struck my heart and soul and will remain in my memory forever. . . . Amy K. Sorrells could not have described the events happening with more authenticity . . . than she did. If this story doesn’t ‘get’ you, no others will.”

FRESH FICTION

Before I Saw You

“Readers will appreciate the uneasy marriage of tough reality and life-giving grace, and lose themselves in Sorrells’s understated but lyrical prose.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY, starred review

“Sorrells’s latest contains heart-wrenching, emotion-filled scenes, and she skillfully tackles some difficult topics.”

ROMANTIC TIMES

How Sweet the Sound

“This book will turn your emotions inside out and grip your heart with a clawed fist before pouring acid—and then balm—over the wounds. You have been warned. Now, by all means, go buy this unusually edgy and entirely moving inspirational novel and read it for yourself.”

SERENA CHASE, *USA Today*

“Debut inspirational novelist Sorrells opens her story powerfully . . . Sorrells will likely move many readers of faith, and she’s worth watching.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

“You could read *How Sweet the Sound* because you love a well-told story, but Amy Sorrells delivers so much more. Here the depths of pain mankind can inflict meet the unfailing grace that waits to heal all who’ll come.”

SHELLIE RUSHING TOMLINSON, *Belle of All Things Southern*,
author of *Heart Wide Open*

“With poetic prose, lyrical descriptions, and sensory details that bring the reader deep into every scene, Amy K. Sorrells has delivered a lush, modern telling of the age-old story of Tamar. But that’s not all. With a full cast of colorful characters and juxtaposed first-person narratives woven through, this story dives into the Gulf Coast culture of pecan orchards and debutante balls exposing layers of family secrets and sins. In the end comes redemption, grace,

forgiveness, and faith, but not without a few scars carried by those who manage to survive the wrath of hardened hearts. Bravo!”

JULIE CANTRELL, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Into the Free* and *When Mountains Move*

“*How Sweet the Sound* is one of those books you want to savor slowly, like sips of sweet tea on a hot Southern day. Achingly beautiful prose married with honest, raw redemption makes this book a perfect selection for your next book club.”

MARY DEMUTH, author of *The Muir House*

“Meeting these characters and stepping into their worlds forever changed the contour of my heart. Sorrells’s words effortlessly rise from the page with a cadence that is remarkably brave and wildly beautiful.”

TONI BIRDSONG, author of *More Than a Bucket List*

“Filled with brokenness and redemption, grit and grace, *How Sweet the Sound* is a heartrending coming-of-age debut about God’s ability to heal the hurting and restore the damaged. Sorrells deftly reminds us that no matter how dark the night, hope is never lost. Not if we have eyes to see.”

KATIE GANSHERT, author of *Wildflowers from Winter* and *Wishing on Willows*

“A stirring tale of loss and redemption. Amy Sorrells will break your heart and piece it back twice its size.”

BILLY COFFEY, author of *When Mockingbirds Sing*

“A daring and enchanted story, Amy K. Sorrells’s *How Sweet the Sound* beckons readers to a land of pecan groves, bay breezes, and graveyard secrets rising up like the dead on judgment day.”

KAREN SPEARS ZACHARIAS, author of *Mother of Rain*

Then Sings My Soul

THEN
SINGS
MY **SOUL**

AMY K. SORRELLS



Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
Carol Stream, Illinois

Visit Tyndale online at www.tyndale.com.

Visit Amy K. Sorrells online at www.amyksorrells.com.

TYNDALE and Tyndale's quill logo are registered trademarks of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Then Sings My Soul

Copyright © 2015 by Amy K. Sorrells. All rights reserved.

Previously published in 2015 by David C Cook under ISBN 978-1-4347-0545-7. First printing by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., in 2019.

Some Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, *New International Version*,^{*} NIV.^{*} Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.^{*} Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Some Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version,^{*} copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Cover photograph of boy copyright © Mark Owen/Trevillion Images. All rights reserved.
Back cover photograph of bouquet copyright © Annie Spratt/Unsplash.com. All rights reserved.

Back cover and interior photograph of grunge texture copyright © by Lost & Taken. All rights reserved.

Back cover photograph of iced pistachio paper texture copyright © Flypapertextures. All rights reserved.

Photograph of stonecutter diagram provided by author and used with permission.

Author photograph copyright © 2016 by Christie Turnbull. All rights reserved.

Designed by Libby Dykstra

Published in association with the literary agency of WordServe Literary Group,
www.wordserveliterary.com.

Then Sings My Soul is a work of fiction. Where real people, events, establishments, organizations, or locales appear, they are used fictitiously. All other elements of the novel are drawn from the author's imagination.

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Tyndale House Publishers at csresponse@tyndale.com or call 800-323-9400.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Sorrells, Amy K., author.

Title: Then sings my soul / Amy K. Sorrells.

Description: Carol Stream, Illinois : Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., [2019] | Previously published in 2015.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018043115 | ISBN 9781496426178 (sc)

Subjects: | GSAFD: Historical fiction. | Christian fiction.

Classification: LCC PS3619.O79 T47 2019 | DDC 813/.6—dc23 LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2018043115>

Printed in the United States of America

25	24	23	22	21	20	19
7	6	5	4	3	2	1

January 21, 1904

*Chudniv, a village within the Zhytomyr Oblast
of the Russian Empire (now Ukraine)*

Prologue

Josef Maevski's calloused fingers pressed the brilliant-blue stone against the grit of the turntable as he tried not to rush.

Just the other day, he'd held a half-polished piece of garnet the size of a small strawberry and as crimson red as wine. He had spent hours peering through the loupe, exploring and creating mental maps of the stone's grain, minuscule fractures, and ancient bubbles trapped as the forces of nature formed them. He had only four more facets to create when the stone splintered and cracked clear through, an irreparable chunk flying across the dimly lit room and landing on the edge of the windowsill. A beam of sunlight illuminated the claret sliver so it gleamed like fresh blood on the edge of a cut finger.

I haven't much time, he thought, adding the finishing buffs and polishes to the precious aquamarine, shoving a magnifying loupe against his eye socket and then removing it, angling the stone toward the lantern light and the dwindling sunlight until at last he was satisfied with every facet.

Nobility and villagers alike considered Josef an expert stonemason. The previous spring, an aristocratic family in Kiev commissioned him to create a one-of-a-kind faceting design for a large, egg-shaped aquamarine, chosen for its color, which matched Princess Anastasia's eyes.

Already completed and delivered weeks earlier, Josef's stone would be placed in the center of a gold scepter designed for Tsar Nicholas in celebration of his daughter Anastasia's birthday. The stone in front of him now was one of two smaller versions—still of valuable size—that he'd been working on from what was left of the aquamarine used for the tsar's scepter. Most of the companies whose orders he had received from Kiev shipped him the rough stones, and their coffers were so full that they rarely cared what he did with the scraps.

Josef's father spent years saving enough money to send Josef to Idar-Oberstein, Germany, for an apprenticeship with some of the finest cutters in the world. Because of that, Josef's family could eat and had lived mostly without fear in the bucolic shtetl, one of many in the Pale of Settlement. His primary work as a farmer would never have paid the bills. And with four daughters and two sons and a seventh child on the way, peace and dowries were high priorities. At least those had been his priorities until the recent bloodshed in Kishinev, where there had been yet another slaughter of innocent Jewish brothers and sisters, even babies torn to pieces, during the most recent Passover.

"Josef." One breath from his bride still turned his stomach

upside down, even after eighteen years of marriage. “Here’s your bread and butter. There’s not much beef left.”

“Thank you. Set it there.” He tilted his head slightly in the direction of the table and tattered wingback chair by the fire.

“Josef. You should take a moment and eat something.”

“I know, I know.” He was more gruff with her than he’d intended.

Eliana started back toward the glow of the kitchen, one hand on her lower back as she lurched unevenly from the weight of the near-term baby within her.

“Eliana, wait.”

She turned toward him, her sky-blue eyes melting him with their cool, steady, gentle gaze.

“*Moya lyubov*. Shh, shh, shh, my love. I’m sorry. You know I have to finish. Peter will need this for his journey. The sooner he can leave the better.”

Eliana came back toward him and leaned heavily against the thick wooden worktable as she settled on the stool next to him. Her swollen breasts stretched the scarlet cross-stitching of her blouse. She picked up the aquamarine, which nearly filled the palm of her hand, and a tear rolled down her flushed cheek.

“The color of dawn. Of new beginnings,” Josef said, watching as Eliana ran her fingers over the polished contours of the gem, then set it on the table, nesting it into a dingy piece of cheesecloth.

She wiped her face and sighed, appearing impatient.

“I thought we’d be safe in the Pale, that what happened in Odessa and Kishinev would not come near us. That if you continued using your trade for the tsar . . .”

Josef shook his head and ran his fingers through the ends of his thick black moustache. “We will have to choose a side soon. There is talk in Zhytomyr about the Black Hundreds radicals who are organizing. Among them are those who’d like to kill anyone who even looks like a Jew. It won’t matter that we believe in Yeshua Messiah now. I will fight for my village, for Russia, for my family, and for the faith.”

“For faith? You would fight for it?” Eliana stood again, breathing hard as she trudged toward the window, where fresh snow swirled against the icy panes. Then she turned toward him, her face red with fury. “You heard the reports, Josef. Babies torn to pieces. Babies! Our brothers and sisters stripped naked and herded like cattle into the woods, into great pits, and slaughtered. Who can fight such evil? Not El Shaddai. He doesn’t pass over His chosen ones any longer. And Yeshua Messiah, if He were truly Emmanuel . . .” She held her belly, her interlaced fingers mottled and clenched as if someone were already trying to tear her unborn child from within her.

“The Gospels tell us that even Yeshua Himself felt as if God had forsaken Him, but He hadn’t. He won’t leave us either.” Josef moved toward her, pulling her close, and the two began to sway together as he whispered in her ear, “*Shìma Yis-ra-eil, A-do-nai E-lo-hei-nu, A-do-nai E-chad.*” *Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.*

She did not answer.

He lifted her chin, wiped her tears with a swoop of his calloused thumb, and locked his eyes with hers. *“Ba-ruch sheim k’vod mal-chuto l’o-lam va-ed.” Blessed be the name of the glory of His kingdom forever and ever.*

Eliana pulled her scarf over her head. Her shoulders shook as she cried.

“V’a-hav-ta eit A-do-nai E-lo-he-cha, B’chawl l’va-v’cha.” You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.

She joined Josef in the Shema, their family’s recent conversion to Messianic Judaism not dampening their dedication to offer praise, recite the traditional prayers, and commit to the adoration of God in the midst of fear and pain.

In their grief, each syllable felt to Josef like a forced attempt to believe the words they’d learned as soon as they were able to form words as toddlers; each syllable a vain plea for escape from the new Pharaoh of death bearing down all around them.

“Mama, Peter’s coming!” Zahava’s shout broke the intimacy of the moment.

Josef and Eliana’s oldest daughter had been cross-stitching with her two younger sisters, Tova and Ilana, in the front room by the fire. Now with four-year-old Jakob on his tiptoes at her side, Zahava stood by the window and rubbed a spot of frost off the windowpane. The door to their home slammed open, causing the youngest of Joseph and Eliana’s children, Faigy, not yet two, to startle and burst into tears.

The wind ushered a swirl of snow and ice into the house, along with a young man, tall but slender beneath his layers of sweaters, sheepskin, and fleece. Ice covered his eyebrows, his beaver-skin hat, and his mukluks.

“Are you a man or a beast, Peter?” Josef’s laugh came from the depths of his belly and shook the furniture in the room.

“*Tato*, it’s time.”

Josef’s smile fell, and Eliana pulled the red-faced and whimpering Faigy closer.

“How can this be?” Josef said. “I heard of the madness in Kiev, but Zhytomyr? Are you sure?”

Peter was only fourteen, but he’d shown enough maturity to help other boys from the shtetl deliver milk and other goods across the countryside, where they often learned news. “There are riders. Madmen. The Black Hundreds are well organized now. More interested in Jewish and peasant blood than in Orthodoxy. They’ve covered the city, throwing their propaganda leaflets everywhere, gathering more supporters. They’ve filled storehouses with arms, and barns with horses. They will be in Chudniv by sunset tomorrow, if not sooner.”

Josef moved toward his workroom, and Peter followed him, watching as his father picked up the aquamarine he’d been working on and turned it toward the fire, sending reflections flickering around the room. The stone’s color reminded Peter of the sky on afternoons he had spent ice-skating with his classmates on the frozen pond behind the village dairy. Josef picked up another stone, identical in cut and splendor to the first round stone on the worktable. He wrapped it

and several other stones—some rough and others brilliantly faceted—in cheesecloth and tucked them into a leather satchel. The crinkle of wax paper came from the kitchen, where Eliana wrapped bread and cured beef.

“You must go,” said Josef, his enormous hands trembling as he handed Peter the bag of stones. “Take Galya. He is the strongest of the horses. His dapple-gray coat will blend with the birch and the aspen. He will get you across the Carpathian Mountains and foothills and into Hungary. Find your way to the sea as we talked about, and use these stones to buy your train tickets to Rotterdam and your passage to America.”

“But, *Tato*—” Peter tried to protest as his mother pulled him toward her.

Eliana hung the strap of the leather satchel stuffed with food across Peter’s chest, then tightened the buckle as he held up his arms while she fussed. When she finished, he stuffed the bag of stones deep into the inside pocket of his fleece-lined coat.

“I thought we’d have more time,” Peter said.

“Me too,” said Josef. “Try not to worry. We will be fine as long as people still believe I am an artisan and for the tsar, for Russia. Zahava, Tova, and Ilana are strong like their mama, and they’ll be here to help. Send letters when you can. Once you find work and a place to live, we will come too. They say there’s good work in America. Lots of work for laborers. Factories. Fisheries. The ocean. Can you imagine?”

Peter could not.

"I will finish more stones and use them to pay our way once you are settled," Josef continued. "Faigy will be bigger, and the baby will have arrived and be strong enough to travel. But you must go first."

Eliana put her arms around Peter's shoulders as little Jakob clung to her skirts, his hazel eyes wide with concern.

"Mama." Jakob's chin quivered.

Peter pulled back from his mother's embrace and squatted onto his haunches so he was at eye level with his little brother. He put his hands onto the boy's small shoulders. "It'll be okay, Jakob. I promise." Peter stood and adjusted the belt across the waist of his sheepskin *kozhukh*.

"Jakob, come here," Zahava called in a gentle but scolding voice from near the hearth where she and her sisters clung to one another and held the younger ones close.

The wetness of Peter's tears created bright-red splotches on Eliana's faded scarlet head scarf as he held his mother once more. Then he turned to Josef, who helped him fasten the top of his *kozhukh* and tuck in his woolens as if he were a schoolboy again.

"Let's go, *miy syn*. I'll help you ready Galya."

Eliana didn't bother to wipe the tears flowing down the grooves of her grief-blotted face. She clung to Faigy and leaned into her children, all of them staring at the heavy wooden door after Josef and Peter left.

Jakob ran to the frosty window and used his small fist to clear a spot. He stood on his tiptoes again and strained to watch his father and Peter prepare Galya for the journey.

Late October 1994

South Haven, Michigan

~1

Nel Stewart pushed her bronze, wire-rimmed glasses up on her nose as she peered through the thick window over the wing of the plane and watched the sunrise turn the tops of the gray clouds golden yellow. The color reminded her of the aspens she'd hiked beneath the day before. She'd wanted to soak in as much of Santa Fe as she could, hoping the life she'd found there in nature and the art she loved so dearly would buoy her, if not brace her, for what awaited her in Michigan. She turned a grape-size, turquoise stone ring around the fourth finger of her right hand. It was one of the first pieces of jewelry she'd made, setting it herself in a wide band of pounded silver.

She grimaced as she bit back the corner of her thumb's cuticle until it bled.

"Coffee?" the flight attendant whispered, leaning slightly over the sleeping bear of a man in the seat next to her. "This is my last pass before we land in Detroit."

"Sure. Black, please. And do you have a bandage?" Nel raised her eyes apologetically.

"I do." The flight attendant—Amanda, her name tag read—smiled as she bent toward the bottom of the refreshment cart. Nel studied Amanda's perfectly coiffed blonde hair pulled into a tight bun, with not a stray hair or split end in sight, and she felt suddenly insecure about her own long hair, loose, untrimmed, and never colored. She'd felt proud of her salt-and-pepper grays and the natural way she and her artisan friends wore their hair in Santa Fe. Now she felt almost silly.

Amanda finished rummaging in the beverage cart and handed Nel a bandage.

As Nel pulled the beige strip tight around her stinging thumb, she thought about how she didn't feel forty-three. A couple of stray layers fell toward her face as she reached forward to pull the tray table down from the seat in front of her.

Her mom loved to say, "You're only as old as you feel."

Amanda handed Nel a napkin followed by a steaming cup of coffee.

Nel returned her gaze to the window and wondered if her mom, Catherine Stewart, had felt eighty-two, or if she'd gone right on feeling young until she died two days ago. Nel

thought she'd been aware of how old her parents were getting, but in reality, she hadn't been. She'd failed them both in the worst possible way, not being there when Mom died.

Nel pulled the shade down over the window as the sun glared through and made it nearly impossible for her to read and review the latest catalog featuring her jewelry designs.

She should've been more cognizant of her parents' senescence, but each time they spoke on the phone—almost daily—her mom's voice had sounded the same as it always had, vibrant and wise, steadfast and kind. Definitely not doddering or declining. And for that reason alone, Nel was glad her mom had died suddenly. Nel doubted she could've handled watching her mom suffer through a long, cruel illness such as cancer or emphysema as so many of her friends' parents had, their faces once taut with joy eventually drooping with despair.

And yet as glad as she was that Catherine hadn't had to suffer, she felt heartbroken and angry. She'd never have the chance to say good-bye.

Nel hadn't thought it strange the phone had rung early Wednesday morning. Jakob often called at that time of day, forgetting the time difference between Michigan and New Mexico. But she had been devastated by the reason for his call—that Mom had passed. Not that she didn't adore her father. But she always figured he'd pass first since he was twelve years Catherine's senior. Nel talked to him just as frequently as Catherine. At least once a week she sat at her kitchen table overlooking the Sangre de Cristo Mountains

and listened as her parents passed the phone back and forth and bickered about whose turn it was to talk.

Nel had noticed that, unlike Mom's vibrant voice, Dad's voice sounded old. Gravelly. As though he had a chunk of chicken potpie stuck in his throat but didn't care and kept talking anyway. That's how he had sounded Wednesday, and before she knew the reason for his call, she had wished he'd cough or clear his throat.

"Mom's gone."

Nel had listened, dumbstruck, as he explained what had happened.

"She went to bed as usual last night. . . . Didn't complain of feeling ill at all . . . Doctor gave her a clean bill of health a couple of weeks ago. Tweaked her blood-pressure medication, sure, but nothing more than that. . . . No signs she wouldn't wake up this morning . . . Mattie is helping with the details. . . . Mom had her wishes written up and taped to the inside front cover of her Bible. Hymns picked out and everything. Already paid for a plot for both of us in the cemetery . . ."

The man in the seat next to her stirred. He'd taken full advantage of the hospitality kit the airline provided, removing his shiny loafers and tucking them neatly under the seat in front of him, pulling the nonskid footies over his gold-toed black socks—the same sort Dad wore—crossing his arms as if he wished there were something, or someone, between them, and pulling the cobalt sleep mask over his eyes soon after the wheels of the plane left the tarmac.

She noticed the thick gold band on the ring finger of his left hand and found herself wondering what his life was like. Did he have children? He was certainly middle-aged, the gray around his own temples giving that much away, but he was trim, lacking the paunch of extra weight common on so many of her peers. Had his wife aged along with him, or did she have to work hard now to keep her skin taut and smooth? Was he a hard and detached businessman like many of her parents' friends, or had being born in the middle decades of the century softened him as it had her, growing up serenaded by the music of Buffalo Springfield and Arlo Guthrie, Bob Marley and Joni Mitchell and the like?

Nel thought of Dr. Sam Tucker, with whom she was enjoying her most recent and ongoing affair, though currently things were getting rocky between them. Sam hadn't been able to get off work to come to the funeral, and if she were honest, she was relieved. He was a doctor—an anesthesiologist—and quite good at it if one judged by his fancy car, designer clothes, and condominium overlooking one of Santa Fe's most beautiful vistas. She had been careful to avoid dating someone like him, cultured by most standards but essentially arrogant and materialistic.

Up until she'd met Sam, she'd been content to enjoy informal but sensuous relationships with other artists like herself, affairs that almost seemed to be set to music, with Cat Stevens's songs and long monologues of Wallace Stegner and Walt Whitman playing in the background. She and her lovers would lie back on woolen pueblo blankets under the

golden canopy of autumn aspens of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains until the stars appeared, and then make love beneath the vast expanse of the Milky Way.

She loved being surrounded by artists of all kinds, reveling in the undulation of a potter's wheel, the back-and-forth strokes of a paintbrush, like Georgia O'Keeffe's, bringing life to the deep inner folds of desert flowers, or, as in Nel's case, the wrapping and stringing of beads, the rounding and polishing of stones, and the forming and hammering of metal.

Sam had been a major donor to Nel's artist colony, and as such, the guest of honor at a gala celebrating local folk artists at the New Mexico Museum of Art that spring. He'd caught her off guard as she stood, merlot in her plastic cup, swaying as she studied the way Cézanne had sketched the hard rock of the mountains along the horizon in his work *Les Baigneurs*. Cézanne's work so closely resembled the Rio Chama near Abiquiú that Nel wondered if the painter had actually been to New Mexico—though she didn't think so.

When Sam came over and introduced himself, she'd felt her cheeks redden—had it been from Sam or from the wine? Had he left her so immediately undone? Or was it the fact that they met near *Les Baigneurs*, featuring six unclad men, while over her shoulder was the gesso-on-wood of Juan Amadeo Sánchez's *Christ on the Cross*—Jesus' downturned head, His simple expression, the horizontal lines of defeat.

Nel smiled to herself as she peered unseeing into the steaming cup of airline coffee she held with both hands. She remembered how Sam had placed his hand so gently

on the small of her back that night at the museum, allowing his fingers to travel up her back and down again. As they walked to his car well before the gala ended, the summer wind had lifted her floor-length muslin skirt, causing it to billow behind her. It reminded her of the way Sánchez had painted Jesus' loincloth, as though the rags wafted against the Golgotha winds. Sam hadn't seemed to think anything odd of the fact that she was forty-three and had never married. No, Sam hadn't thought of her as an old maid at all. Quite the contrary, as he enjoyed every part of her that night and countless nights since then.

But those had been their best days. Until recently, through summer and into the fall, he'd been content to play by her rules: no commitment, no questions, no problem. The night before, they'd had another of the major fights occurring more and more often, but she was too worn-out from the sudden news of her mom's death to make amends before she left town for the funeral.

Her ears popped, and she finished the last swig of coffee as the Fasten Seat Belts light illuminated and Nel prepared, along with everyone else, for landing.

A Note from the Author

*Ritual allows those who cannot will themselves out
of the secular to perform the spiritual, as dancing
allows the tongue-tied man a ceremony of love.*

ANDRE DUBUS, "A FATHER'S STORY"

Three important parts of my life inspired this story, the first of which is an organization called Mission to Ukraine (www.missiontoukraine.org). Through our interest in and support of Mission to Ukraine, in 2009 my family began to sponsor—and fall in love with—a boy in Ukraine named Peter Predchuk. As we learned through blog posts of friends who live near and travel to Zhytomyr, Peter was like many thirteen-year-old boys—happy, funny, tenderhearted, and kind. He loved cars and he liked to sing. But Peter was different, too. Abandoned by his mother because she could not care for him and his degenerative muscular dystrophy, he was alone, filthy, and regularly beaten in an orphanage. He was losing hope and growing weaker by the day. But God had special plans for Peter. He was rescued and adopted by a man named Yuri Levchenko (who had numerous biological children). Peter was deeply treasured and loved until he passed away July 1, 2014. Peter was a hero to many, and I had the privilege of finally meeting him in January 2013, in what

has been proven to be one of the most pivotal moments of my life.

The second inspiration for this story was my paternal grandfather, Joseph Kossack, a savant hobby lapidarist who died at the ripe young age of ninety-four, a month shy of his ninety-fifth birthday. Up until a month before he died, he was vibrant. He lived in his own apartment, enjoyed life with his friends and neighbors, told the same stories over and over again, and yes, he still drove a car. I discovered through genealogy research, as well as through conversations he and I had the week before he passed, that his grandparents—my paternal great-great-grandparents—were most likely Jewish immigrants who escaped to the United States from the land now known as Ukraine. They probably fled during the first waves of pogroms, which occurred in the 1880s in what was known as the Pale of Settlement. The Pale was a section of Imperial Russia where Jews were forced to live, and conditions there were often harsh and violent in the ways described in the story, and in stories such as the beloved *Fiddler on the Roof*. Between 1881 and 1914, nearly two million Jews fled from the area, mostly to the United States. Among them were warriors called Cossacks, which is the origin of my maiden name. The story Grandpa Joe liked to tell was that my great-great-grandfather's true last name was so complicated, Ellis Island intake administrators assigned him a new one: Kossack.

Learning of my likely Jewish heritage compounded my empathy for the plight of the people of Ukraine, and I was

compelled to write a story that not only reflects the deep pain and struggles within the region, but also the ways in which Yahweh is with us throughout all of our sojourns: Jehovah-Shammah. Indeed, there is no place where we can flee from his glorious love, grace, and presence (Psalm 139).

In addition to writing from a Jewish perspective, for some time I have wanted to incorporate the work of a lapidarist into a novel. All my life, my grandfather Joseph brought his shiny rock and mineral creations with him on his visits to our home. The brilliant gemstones and cabochons—as well as his lengthy stories of what each stone was made of and where he found it, and the details of gemstone conventions he attended—mesmerized me. The metaphor of a rough and unsightly rock or mineral being faceted and polished into something beautiful, and how Yahweh does the same thing with us, is one that never grows old or clichéd to me.

The third inspiration for this story was my work as a registered nurse caring for elderly patients. I see how families struggle with end-of-life care decisions, and how exhausting and discouraging the process can be for everyone involved. When an elderly person suffers a fall as Jakob did in this story, it often sets off a cascade of difficult decisions and recovery processes. But this season of life is not without hope—far from it. While some of the elderly patients I care for have succumbed completely to dementia and Alzheimer's disease, a good number of them have minds still as sharp as yours and mine. They love to tell stories about their youth, how they met and courted their spouses, the war years, you

name it. They love to tell stories about their *lives*. And we are wise to listen.

Another interesting aspect of *Then Sings My Soul* is how the title came about. It's a phrase from "How Great Thou Art," and once I heard the story behind the hymn, I knew I had to find a place for it in this book. Stuart Hine was an English missionary to Ukraine who stumbled upon the Russian text for "How Great Thou Art" and translated it into English. His travels and missionary work took him all across Eastern Europe, and the beauty of the Carpathian Mountains prompted him to write the hymn's fourth and final stanza. Indeed, the entire hymn speaks to the steadfast, enduring beauty of God and His faithfulness to us throughout the ages—a truth that Jakob eventually realizes.

Finally, the blue gemstone in the story (featured on the first edition cover of this book) was inspired by one of the hundreds of gemstones designed and faceted by my grandfather. In the last stages of edits, I discovered the stone in a plastic bag tucked in a corner of a manila file folder that was stuffed in a binder full of his old faceting designs. The only reason the folder even caught my eye was because it was marked "Star of David," which of course was a wonderfully perfect match for this story.