



## Author Q&A

### Melanie Dobson | *Hidden Among the Stars*



**Melanie Dobson** is the award-winning author of almost twenty historical romance, suspense, and time-slip novels including *Catching the Wind*, *Chateau of Secrets*, and *Shadows of Ladenbrooke Manor*. Three of her novels have won Carol Awards; *The Black Cloister* won the *Foreword Magazine* Religious Fiction Book of the Year, and *Catching the Wind* won the 2018 Audie Award for Inspirational Fiction.

Melanie is the former corporate publicity manager at Focus on the Family and owner of the publicity firm Dobson Media Group. When she isn't writing, Melanie enjoys teaching both writing and public relations classes at George Fox University.

Melanie and her husband, Jon, have two daughters. They live near Portland, Oregon, and love to hike and camp in the mountains of the Pacific Northwest and along the Pacific Coast. Melanie also enjoys exploring ghost towns and abandoned homes, helping care for kids in her community, and reading stories with her girls.

Visit Melanie online at <http://www.melaniedobson.com>.

1. **What inspired you to write *Hidden Among the Stars*? Can you tell us about the research that went into writing this novel?**

My husband and I backpacked across Europe to celebrate our fifth wedding anniversary, and our favorite stop was the ancient town and alpine lake called Hallstatt. On this trip, we discovered that this region in Austria's Alps is often called the "Devil's Dustbin" because the Nazis retreated through here near the end of World War II, throwing all sorts of valuable items in the lakes. Because of the water's depth and the many hiding places in the underwater forests, caves, and shifting sands, people continue searching for World War II artifacts here today. After learning this history, I began digging through mounds of old books and interviews to create my own story about two people—characters in the past and present—searching for a lost treasure in Lake Hallstatt.

2. **You explore fear, evil, and God's sovereignty in your novel. How do you hope readers might relate these themes to their own lives?**

When we experience tragedy, many of us ask where God is in the midst of this pain. Both the past and contemporary characters in *Hidden Among the Stars* struggle to understand where God was during the Holocaust and where God is today when people are hurting. As I wrote this story, I was reminded that this life we're living is a battle, the world around us a battlefield, and as readers step into the fictional journey, I hope they are reminded that God doesn't run away when they are suffering. He is right in the midst of their pain, and in the end, no matter what evil does in attempt to destroy this world, the peace and love and holiness of Christ will prevail.

3. ***Hidden Among the Stars* features several characters whose lives intersect after 80 years. How does this perspective make your novel unique?**



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Not only can I invite readers on a historical journey through time-slip fiction, we can experience through story what happens as a result of the past. I love weaving together the threads of past and present storylines and ultimately having these stories collide near the end of a novel as secrets are revealed and old wounds are redeemed.

**4. What role does faith play in this story?**

Faith is integral to *Hidden Among the Stars*. As I wrote this book, I dug deep into a question that has haunted me for years: how can a loving God allow so much pain in our world? I wrestled with this question personally as my characters in both the contemporary and historical portions struggled to find an answer. I hope their conclusions will encourage and inspire readers in their own journey.

**5. Which scene in *Hidden Among the Stars* did you most enjoy writing? What was your hardest scene to write?**

Actually the first historical scene—the one with Max digging in the cemetery—was my favorite one to write, and the first contemporary scene with Callie was my hardest. The novel begins with Annika watching her friend Max as he digs in this plot behind his family’s estate, and the first paragraph hints at the future for her character. Then the scene transitions into her longing to be loved by him.

The second chapter of the book, the one with Callie finding an inscription in an old *Bambi* book, ended up being one of my favorites to read, but only after writing multiple scenes with different characters, trying to find the best way to launch the contemporary story. Once I realized that Callie was going to own a children’s bookstore with her sister—and be an avid collector of used books—I was ready to write the rest of my story.

**6. In many of your novels, ordinary people are challenged to do extraordinary things. How did the historical characters in this novel respond differently to the same threat?**

I am fascinated by how many seemingly ordinary people incredible things during World War II to rescue those being threatened. In *Hidden Among the Stars*, I have characters who chose to risk their lives to help others escape while others chose to ignore the plight of their neighbors or even assist the Nazis with their destruction. Some characters in this story were able to leave Austria while others decided to collaborate with the enemy. Some chose to hide, several felt so defeated that they quit trying to fight, and one took her own life because she feared what the Nazis might do. All were reacting to the same threat but responded in very different ways.

**7. Why did you decide to feature children’s literature as part of this story?**

At first, I wanted to counter the heaviness of the past scenes with the life and fun of children’s books, but the more I wrote, I was reminded of some of the poignant and provoking themes in



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great children’s literature. Many children’s books are about confronting fear, and this novel features two books written in the shadow of World War II that helped both children and adults overcome fear.

8. **As you were crafting the characters featured in *Hidden Among the Stars*, which one did you personally relate to the most? Which point of view was the most difficult to communicate?**

I didn’t like the choices of all my characters, but I poured myself into creating them, attempting to understand the motivations of even my darkest characters. I connected with Annika and Callie’s love of books and the curiosity that drove them both. Luzi Weiss was probably my hardest point of view to write. Her character evolved quite a bit through the writing process because I needed to understand her much better than I did initially to communicate her story.

9. **Your main characters find God’s beauty and power in nature, music, animals, and books. Where do you find God in your life?**

I love to find glimpses of God wherever I go, but He seems to demonstrate his beauty and power to me most through the intricate design of his outdoor creation and the strength and wonder of weather, particularly a good snow or thunderstorm. My process of writing is, in part, listening and learning from the Master Creator. He speaks to me through story—both the ones I write and by hearing or reading other people’s stories as well. Through story, he often reveals an answer to something I’ve been struggling with in the most unexpected way.

10. **What are some future projects you’re working on?**

I just returned from the Netherlands and am finishing a time-slip novel based on an incredible rescue mission that happened in Amsterdam during World War II. The heart of this story is about identity—who we are in Christ, no matter the circumstances—and I hope it will capture again the power of seemingly ordinary people doing extraordinary things to fight evil and rescue those in need.

11. **If you could choose one Bible verse as a key theme for *Hidden Among the Stars*, which would it be?**

“The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?” Psalm 27:1 (NIV). Throughout the writing of *Hidden Among the Stars*, God taught me once again that no matter what happens in this life, I don’t have to be afraid!

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