

## **Amanda Tero Interviews Sonrise Stable Books Author, Vicki Watson 2018**

### **Amanda: When did you decide to write the Sonrise Stable books?**

When my mother died in 2006, I began to contemplate what kind of long-term impact our lives have - whether anything we do lives on after us—here or in eternity. At that time, I was approaching fifty. Suddenly, the brevity of life filled me with a sense of urgency to accomplish something worthwhile. I wasn't sure what that "something" might be. It had never been a life-long dream to write a book.

An idea came to me one day about a girl and her pony, and how I could use a story about them to make the Gospel message real to kids. I immediately rejected it, reasoning that I didn't know how to write a book, and even if I did write the story, no one would read it. The problem was, the idea would not leave me alone! For months, I couldn't get it out of my mind. Finally, to relieve myself of that mental torment, I sat down and wrote what I thought would be a short story for a picture book. The funny thing was, after writing those thoughts, I got another idea, and then another. It quickly turned into a chapter book, which became *Rosie and Scamper*, the first in the Sonrise Stable series.

### **Amanda: What was your inspiration for this series?**

I homeschooled my daughters through high school. One of my most satisfying experiences was teaching them each how to read. As they became voracious readers, it was important to me to monitor what they were putting into their hearts and minds. I scrutinized the books they selected and was often dismayed at the content, even sometimes from Christian publishers. What I found particularly troublesome was the increasingly child-centric focus that often depicted children as smarter than the parents and able to function relatively independently from them. The books frequently had one or both parents missing, children disrespecting their elders, and siblings not getting along with each other. I really wasn't interested in having my daughters read such warped representations of family life.

I guess that was a negative inspiration, however, once I started writing, I was determined not to write books that followed that trend. I've often thought of my books as a mixture of *Black Beauty*, *The Waltons*, and a bit of *Grandma's Attic*, with me being the grandmother. God set up the family structure for a reason. I think kids today would be comforted in knowing that they don't have to solve all their problems on their own. That doesn't mean that adults dominate the Sonrise Stable series. The main characters are children, but they manage to get along with their siblings and respect their parents and grandmother—at least most of the time—as did my own daughters.

### **Amanda: Which Sonrise Stable book is closest to your heart? Why?**

There are parts of each book that stick out to me, but if I had to pick one, it would be *Operation Christmas Spirit*. Although there are many picture books about Christmas, there are few chapter books, and not many of those have a spiritual focus. After resolving to write a Christmas book, I felt a terrible weight descend on me. To write a meaningful and accurate story about the birth of our Savior seemed like such a daunting task, that my mind went blank for a long time. Then one day I read a short story by Pearl S. Buck, *Christmas Day in the Morning*. I cried at the emotions it stirred in me. And with that as a jumpstart, I began to write.

**Amanda: I loved how you included so many details in the family's life—like ASL, horse rescue, and camp life. When (and how) did you decide to add these into your series?**

As I look back, it's interesting to see how God prepared me over the years to write these books. I was painfully shy when I was younger. I did a lot of thinking and very little talking. I had extensive conversations in my head, with me coming up with the words everyone said. Not surprisingly, dialog is one of the easiest things for me to write!

As a horse lover from as far back as I can remember, horses have been an important part of my life. Some of my happiest childhood memories involved horses. My daughters and I share many memories of 4-H, county fairs, horse shows, and trail rides together. Many of those experiences found their way into the books. My oldest daughter is in fact a nurse. And my middle daughter is an ASL interpreter. My youngest, who was only about thirteen when the first book was written, did stay involved with horses longer than the other two. She did not become a horse trainer—however she would make a good one. She is currently studying engineering in college and still owns the horse Scamper was based on.

Years ago, I attended a Sermon on the Mount presentation by horse trainer and counselor, Lew Sterrett. He demonstrated how the relationship between a horse and its master is similar to our relationship with God. That opened my eyes to seeing spiritual lessons in my own dealings with horses. Sterrett's presentations was aimed at an adult audience. I realized that I could use my own experiences with horses to bring similar lessons down to a level that young people could understand. At that time, writing a book hadn't occurred to me, but my daughters and I started the Christian Cowgirl Club, a day camp for neighborhood girls. In those camps, the girls learned to ride and take care of horses, and I passed on some of the spiritual lessons connected to horses, that I was learning myself.

**Amanda: I'd love for my readers to “get to know you” a little better. What are three of your favorite things to do?**

I am down to one pony, Toby, which my eight-year-old foster daughter and I purchased at an Amish auction this summer. We enjoy driving him around in the pony cart. I enjoy having children over to help take care of the pony and learn how to harness him for driving.

I used to be a jogger, but now enjoy walking, hiking, and biking. I work as a freelance web designer and computer programmer. I love that combination of logic and creativity, and it allows me to work from home on my own schedule. I wouldn't call myself a nerd though. I definitely view the computer as a creative tool rather than an entertainment device. My mind is like an idea factory. Sometimes I feel bombarded with all the ideas I have for projects—more than I'll ever be able to accomplish in this lifetime.

**Amanda: Would you please share your salvation testimony with us?**

I grew up in the 70's, when the women's liberation movement was really taking off. It all sounded great to me at the time. In a class of about one hundred at the public high school I attended, there was only one student that I would have identified as a Christian. She never witnessed to me, but the fact that she was willing to be different stuck in my mind. It was an atmosphere where what was wrong was made to seem good, and what was good was made to seem wrong.

I attended a liberal, mainline denominational church—because my mom made me, but the gospel was never clearly or strongly presented. I didn't see anything different in the lives of the people who attended there. I went through the membership class at age eleven or twelve because that was the thing to do in that church. I thought I would feel something different after joining the church, but I didn't. If anyone had asked whether I was a Christian, I would have said yes, but there was no certainty. That experience left me feeling empty and confused. Was that all there was to Christianity?

Ironically, the few people in my life who I was reasonably sure were Christians, never spoke to me about it. Outwardly, I was a kind, sensitive person, so I guess they equated that with Christianity. Inside, however, I felt lost and unloved. I floundered my way through my early to mid-twenties, half-heartedly seeking God, but never fully committing to him. Looking back, I realize that God had His hand on me from a young age, and it was His steering and nudging that kept me from going too far astray.

At twenty-seven, I was married and expecting my first child. In the months before her birth, I resolved to read all the way through the Bible, for the first time in my life. I didn't understand most of it, but I made it all the way through Revelation before she arrived. God used that baby girl to finally break down the barrier that surrounded my heart. That might sound strange, but it makes sense. After all, He showed His love for all of us in a similar way—by sending a baby Boy to Bethlehem.

Suddenly, my whole world was different. Things that had seemed right to me before, I knew were wrong. I had a fire and passion for God and His word. I began reading my Bible, not because of some resolution I had made, but because I wanted to—and it was beginning to make sense!

Soon after that, I went back to the church I'd grown up in, excited to tell those people that there was more to Christianity. I begged the pastor to start a Bible study, but he refused. He actually told me that my experience was just emotion and it would pass. Thirty years later, that fire for God and His word has only grown stronger.

I've often wondered why no one witnessed to me when I was younger. I was a lost and lonely girl, seeking a true relationship with God. If someone had reached out to me then, it might have kept me from making some costly mistakes in my life. That's part of the reason why the books in the *Sonrise Stable* series have explicitly Christian messages. As a young person, I was aching to know truth, and no one would share it with me. I don't want to make that same mistake. As an author, I don't have anything better to offer young readers than the eternal truths found in God's word.

### **Amanda: Who is your favorite author to read?**

After I became a Christian, since I attended a church that oddly enough, didn't have Bible studies, I began studying on my own. For the next fifteen years, I devoured commentary after commentary. During that time, I read very little fiction, other than what I read to my daughters. I remember, in particular, reading *The Genesis Record* by Henry Morris. That book opened my eyes to the truth of creation versus evolution.

After fifteen years, I finally commentaried myself out. The problem then was that I couldn't find many good Christian fiction writers. I think there's a huge need in this area. I remember scaring myself silly, late one night, reading Frank Peretti's, *This Present Darkness*. Many people criticize the *Left Behind* series, however those books were a huge influence on me. They may or may not be correct in their

interpretation of end-time events, and their literary quality can be debated, however the series filled me with a sense of urgency to witness to people.

These days my reading consists primarily of weighty tomes on php, javascript, html, css, and other equally exciting topics!

**Amanda:** Thank you so much, Vicki! I loved reading the answers to your questions and get to know you better! Your books have been a blessing, and I pray that God will continue to use them in the lives of many young readers!



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