

Isabel's Secret



The New
Millennium
Girls



by Jan May
Illustrated by Julianna Davis

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New Millennium Girl Books

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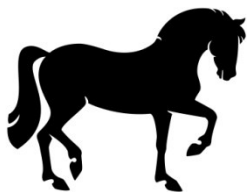
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Chapter One

The Secret

Holly held up her watch. "Get ready, Izzy... Get set... Go!"

Isabel tightened her red bandana and took five steps backward. Then she darted forward, grabbed a fistful of Starlight's mane, and flung herself onto the horse's back. Her heart jumped. She gave him a kick. "Hee Yah!"

Starlight whinnied and tossed his head into the morning air, then bolted across the field like he was being chased by wild bees.

Holly jumped up and down. "You're going to do it, Izzy!" she shouted. "You'll be Misty Springs' winner again!"

The chilly November air swished Isabel's black hair across her face. Her knees gripped Starlight's sides. Together they raced past the tree house she and Holly had built five summers ago. They galloped past the pumpkin patch she and Mom planted this spring. They sprinted past the tree-lined

slopes and into the wide-open rangeland of the Angel Ridge Ranch.

“Winners never quit,” she chanted, “and quitters never win, because I serve the mighty God that lives deep within!”

Isabel Morningsky never did anything halfway. It was November, but sweat beaded her forehead and dripped into her dark-brown eyes. She swiped away the drops and leaned forward. Small rocks shot up from under Starlight’s hooves. Isabel could feel the rumbling of his gait on the dirt as they rounded the oak tree.

“Get up!” she shouted. A cloud of dust rose from the ground and covered her boots. “Come on, boy!” she nudged harder with her foot. “You can do it! We’ll take back the gold cup from Kip Johnson. That’ll show him. Don’t tell me a girl can’t race as fast as a boy!”

Starlight snorted as if he understood every word and picked up the pace all the way back to the ranch.

Holly stood on the corral fence with her wavy blonde hair pulled back by a lavender headband that matched her shorts. She raised her arm like a flag then lowered it as Isabel and Starlight flashed by.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” said Holly, pretending to be an announcer. “Eleven-year-old, soon-to-be-twelve, Is-a-bel Morn-ing-sky, Misty Spring,

Colorado's new winner of the bareback competition!"

Isabel pulled back hard on the reins, and Starlight skidded to a halt. Isabel jumped down and trotted over to Holly, panting. "How fast was I?"

"Six minutes, forty seconds. You beat your time!"

Isabel slapped her leg. "Rats! I still need twenty more seconds to beat Kip Johnson. She frowned and looked down. "Losing two years in a row is such a disgrace. Besides," she said, glancing up at Holly, "I hate the way he gloats when he wins."

"Everyone does," said Holly, folding her arms.

Isabel's heart sank as she petted Starlight's nose. "I know you did your best." She grabbed his reins and tugged. "Come on, Holly, let's give Starlight a drink."



That night Isabel lay wide-eyed in her bed, staring out her window at the starry night sky. The annual Thanksgiving Day Bareback Race was only three days away. She *had* to win the title back from Kip Johnson this year or she would never live it down. Kip had moved from Kentucky two years ago, where he'd been a champion in jumping competitions. She had to admit, he was a pretty sharp rider, but so stuck up!

Isabel rolled over and tapped her fingers on the nightstand. *And the way he brags about boys being*

better riders than girls! Isabel punched her pillow. Then she jumped out of bed and paced back and forth. "How can I make Starlight run faster?" she murmured.

Little shivers of joy filled Isabel's heart at the thought of Starlight. The moonlight had shone through the barn window the crisp October night he was born. It lit up the white star on his little brown head. Isabel knew instantly his name should be Starlight. Once he could stand up, she'd stroked his soft mane. He looked at her with big brown eyes and nuzzled her.

Isabel sighed at the memory. It was one of the best nights of her life. *Kindred spirits*, she thought, *right from the start. Maybe I should go out to the barn and check on him right now.*

Isabel pulled on her jeans, tucked in her nightgown, and crept down the hall. When she reached the top of the stairs, a voice startled her from the downstairs den. There was no mistaking her Grandmother Biltmore's sharp tone.

"Isabel is a complete mess. She doesn't comb her hair, and she smells like a swamp. For goodness' sake, she is almost twelve years old!"

Isabel looked in the hall mirror. "Geesh!" she whispered, flattening her hair with her hands. "It's not *that* bad."

Isabel knew Gran could be difficult. Like the time Isabel wanted to bake Mom's special cookies for

their tea party last summer. Grandmother Biltmore had insisted they drive into town and purchase two dozen pink and white petit fours from Camilla's Bakery instead. Isabel had no idea what a petit four was, but Grandmother Biltmore insisted that she *should* know. Isabel licked her lips at the thought. She did love those sweet, tiny, iced squared cakes with crème inside. That's when Grandmother Biltmore asked Isabel to call her Gran.

Hmmm...Isabel thought. Things always seemed to work out. Maybe Gran's ranting this time is just like one of those other times.

Isabel could hear her mom pipe in, "Now, Mother, I know Isabel may not be the perfect little lady, but she is amazingly smart. Do you know that she knows almost as much about horses as any rancher around here does? She raised Starlight from a foal and trained him all by herself."

That's it. You tell her, Mom, thought Isabel, pursing her lips. She crept down the stairs further to peek into the room.

"This ranch!" said Gran, throwing up her hands. "I was hoping it would be financial security for Isabel's future. She looks and smells more like a ranch *hand*."

Mom's face turned red, like she might explode any minute. Isabel held her breath to hear what she would say.

"She's happy and healthy," Mom said. "That's what matters."

Isabel grinned and nodded. Happy and healthy for sure! How could Gran not love the flower-covered hills that perched outside her front door? They were Isabel's best friend. Or the horses! Isabel shivered with delight thinking about being them. It was magical riding on the back of a horse, anytime you wanted. She felt so free on Angel Ridge Ranch. It was so much a part of her. She could never leave it.

Isabel could hear Gran's voice like a whistling tea kettle boiling over with hot steam. She leaned closer.

"Next year she'll be a teenager," Gran huffed. "You can't stop her from growing up, Grace. Who is she really going to meet out here? In Boston she could meet young men from all the finest families – someone who could" --Gran hesitated – "give her a future."

Mom scowled. "You mean . . . unlike Isabel's father?"

"Hmph," Gran grunted.

Isabel knew Gran didn't approve of Dad. She always talked "down" to him, sniffed, and put her nose in the air whenever Dad was in the room. Isabel's blood boiled just thinking about it.

She glanced up at the family pictures on the wall. Dad was a wild, dark-haired, modern-day cowboy

when Mom met him at a rodeo that day. Dad always told her it was love at first sight.

Isabel peeked back in the room.

Mom stood up and paced over near the window. "People who are born with money are no better than those who get it through honest work."

Grandmother Biltmore sat tall in her chair and straightened her white nightdress. "I've come to a decision. I've decided to take back the loan I gave you for the ranch."

Isabel ducked back on the stairs and clapped a hand over her mouth to keep her gasp inside. *No ranch?*

Mom's voice was quivering. "What? Mother, you can't do that. It would kill Sam. He's put his heart and soul into this ranch. If you would take just five minutes of your time to look around, you'd see what a great job he's done with it."

"You mean raising smelly sheep and horses?"

Isabel could see her mother's shadow pacing back and forth.

"You're impossible!" said Mom.

"All right," said Gran. "Keep the ranch, but Isabel comes to Boston with me to attend a private school for girls. Maybe we can somehow stop this runaway train."

Isabel couldn't believe her ears. *Tear me away from the ranch and haul me back to Boston? No!* Isabel

shook her head. "Of all the mean things to do, Gran," she whispered. "I thought we were friends."

"This is not the Old West, Mother," Mom said. "It's the twenty-first century. Woman can be anything they want to be." She raised her voice. "You're never happy unless you're controlling someone's life, are you, Mother? It's the Biltmore way, after all. Well, you're not going to control Isabel's."

"She's going to find out the truth soon enough, Grace. She's getting older. Then where will her future be?"

Mom sighed. "I wish we'd never kept it a secret. I knew it was a mistake from the beginning. Now you're trying to use it against us."

Isabel sat on the stairs with her head in her hands. Grandmother Biltmore's words pierced her heart like a dagger. *What secret? Why did they keep it from me? I can't leave Misty Springs and go to Boston. I just can't!*

Isabel sprang to her feet. *I won't!* She carefully crept down the stairs, sneaking past the den, and fled outside into the cold night air. She marched across the yard as if she were going to war. She clenched her teeth and slapped her fist in her hand. "Why would Gran do this? I don't understand!"

Isabel whistled low when she walked into the barn. Starlight walked over to the stall door. His soft

lips nipped at her pockets, looking for a treat. Isabel reached out and stroked his soft neck. "Sorry, boy," she said. "I didn't have time to get one." She tilted her head and thought for a moment. "What did Gran mean about taking back the loan on the ranch? What loan?"

Isabel couldn't imagine life without Angel Ridge Ranch. She loved waking up before the sun every morning and hearing the last cricket sing at night. She didn't mind the hard work of feeding the horses or mucking out the stalls. It all felt so right.

"Starlight, I don't understand. Will Mom and Dad lose the ranch if I don't go to Gran's snooty old school?"

Isabel slid down on a pile of hay like a limp noodle and stared at the wooden ceiling. "What are we going to do?" She lay there for a good long time, chewing on a piece of hay and trying to figure out how to stop Grandmother Biltmore's terrible plan.

Isabel yawned. She was too weary to keep on worrying. She cuddled up on the hay. "Winners never quit," she mumbled, "and quitters never..."

Isabel slipped off into a restless sleep before she could finish the sentence.

Reviews



Isabel's Secret is a book for 8-11- year old girls that kept my ten-year-old captivated. She couldn't wait for me to review it—she snatched it and read it in a day, she is now *rereading* it! This is a great book about culture and a girl's dream. My daughter said she'd give it more than five stars if she could. ~Author Laura Vernet Hilton

I enjoyed *Isabel's Secret* a lot! I like Isabel's motto: "Winner's never quit and quitters never win, because I serve the mighty God that lives deep within." *Isabel's Secret* is an exciting book to read! This is a great set of books and very unique. If you have a girl who likes writing, reading, and/or paper dolls, I highly recommend these books! ~The Old Schoolhouse Magazine

Horses. A Colorado ranch. Two best friends. One with a secret. What a great set-up for a middle-grade novel! Isabel proclaims throughout the book, "Winners never quit and quitters never win, because I serve the mighty God that lives deep within!" With fast-moving, engaging prose, an interesting mystery, and spiritual themes, *Isabel's Secret* would make a delightful gift for any eight-to-twelve-year-old girl. ~Author and Award-Winning Journalist, Meadow Rue Merrill

[Isabel's Secret](#) comes in a bundle of reading books, a [writing bundle with paper dolls](#), and a [language](#) pack. Perfect for the aspiring young author and beginner alike!



Isabel's Fun-Fair Fiasco

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Cover by Rachel Dangler



For Avyi~

my awesome,

beautiful, spiritual

granddaughter and cover model

who is a true

New Millennium Girl in Christ!

Thank You!

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Chapter One

Little Chaps Rodeo

Isabel's boots clomped in the dust as she trotted alongside the stubborn lamb. "The next contestant is Isabel Morningsky," said the announcer.

"Wrestle him to the ground!" cried Dad from the sidelines at the Little Chaps Rodeo.

"Grrr!" Isabel tackled the sheep with all her might. "You're going down, sheep."

"Baaa," bleated the poor lamb. He wiggled to the right. He twisted to the left. He squirmed out of Isabel's grasp, pushing her to

the ground, and fled away to the other side of the ring.

I'm not giving up that easily! Isabel set her chin in determination and stood up, lunging after the sheep. "Going to give me a fight, huh?" She cornered the sheep and dove onto its soft, wooly back. "Winners never quit, and quitters never win," she muttered as she tugged on the sheep. "I have to win this to go on to the finals."

Isabel grabbed the sheep's head and locked onto it, panting. "For I serve the mighty God that lives deep within!" She gave it a twist, and the sheep fell to the ground with a *thud*. Isabel was strong for twelve years old, but she knew where her *real* strength came from.

The cheers from the crowd echoed in the arena. Isabel looked up toward Heaven in thanks, then tipped her cowboy hat and bowed to the crowd. She released the mournful sheep. "And that's the way it's done, folks!" she said triumphantly.

Holly dashed over. "I got it all on video, Izzy. It will make the greatest movie ever. We can put it on YouTube and be famous!"

Isabel stood up and brushed the dust off her jeans. She sighed contentedly. *I love Little Chaps Rodeo!*

"Attention, ladies and gentleman," said an announcer over the loud speaker. "Little Chaps Rodeo is proud to welcome our surprise guests from Cripple Creek Pow Wow."

Isabel and Holly looked at each other with wide eyes. A drum started to beat. Native Americans dressed in regalia sat on beautiful, white-and-brown spotted horses and trotted into the ring.

Holly held her breath. "I wonder if . . . yes! There he is!" she squealed.

Isabel rushed over and jumped on the rail of the corral. She waved her cowboy hat at Jason Twofeathers, the mysterious boy

she'd met at camp last month. Jason's warm, brown eyes met hers; he smiled and nodded. He liked to go frogging and fishing, just like Isabel did. He'd saved her from being bored at that yucky girl camp. Jason was the coolest boy Isabel had ever met.

Behind the men on horses danced pretty Indian maids. They were dressed in brown buckskin. Tiny bells sewn on the bottom of their dresses jingled when they moved.

"Listen," said Holly. "They're just like the ones you wore at the Pow Wow last month."

Isabel felt like she was in a dream. Her whole life had changed since that day at the pow wow, when she found out she was part Native American. It was a secret her Grandmother Biltmore had made her parents keep all of her life.

The local newspaper came to Isabel's house and wrote a story on the drama of how

it had all unfolded. They even took Isabel's picture and put it on the front page. When the Native American Association read about it in the paper, they offered the Morningstars a grant to keep the ranch. After that, they didn't need Grandmother Biltmore's money anymore.

When the parade ended, Isabel ran up to Jason. "Hey!"

Jason smiled and nodded. "Isabel Morningsky," he said. His shoulder-length, jet-black hair was woven with feathers and shone in the afternoon sun. His brown eyes laughed.

Isabel ran her hand over the flank of his painted horse. "He's beautiful. Is he yours?"

"Yep. Well, sort of. I'm taking care of him for the Pow Wow." He jumped down and patted Thunder's flank. "Wanna ride him?"

"Really?" Isabel hoisted herself up on the sleek, spotted horse with feathers woven

in his mane and flung her leg over. She could see the golden sun setting on the horizon, spilling onto the tops of the autumn trees. *It never gets old feeling like you're ten feet tall sitting on the back of a horse.*

Just then, a tan palomino near Isabel spooked and bolted off.

"Help!" cried little Cami Jo, clinging for her life on its back.

"I'll catch her!" cried Isabel.

"Wait!" yelled Jason. Without saying another word, he quickly leapt up, straddling himself on Thunder in the saddle in front of Isabel. "Hold on! Hee-yaw!" He kicked Thunder's sides. Like a flash, they were racing behind Cami Jo, down toward a row of pine trees.

"We're coming, Cami Jo!" shouted Isabel. "Hang on!"

Jason's hair whipped her face; the sound of pounding hooves beat in her ears.

She clung as tightly to Jason as Cami Jo was holding on to her horse. *He's running Thunder kinda hard.* Isabel leaned her face into Jason's back to shield it from the wind.

"Hee-yaw!" Jason pushed Thunder even harder up the hill, swerving through the trees to cut off the spooked horse. Dirt from the ground bounced up and pummeled Isabel's back. Jason rode Thunder so close to Cami Jo's horse that Isabel's leg rubbed up against it.

Then Jason took his chance. He leaned over and grabbed the runaway horse's reins and pulled hard on them. "Whoa, boy, whoa!"

"I tried to stop him, but he wouldn't listen," whimpered Cami Jo.

Isabel slid down from Thunder and climbed on the back of Cami Jo's horse. She hugged Cami Jo, whose cute, freckled face was soaked with tears. "Shhh, don't cry," comforted Isabel, rocking her back and forth.

"It's okay now." She held Cami Jo tight, patting her little, red head.

"Will you walk us back, Jason?" asked Isabel kindly. "Don't worry, Cami Jo. Jason is an expert horse rider. He will walk us back *slow-ly*." She nodded to Jason to go ahead.

"We make a good team, Morning Dove," said Jason with a twinkle in his eye. Isabel liked that.

Isabel and Jason gave five-year-old Cami Jo back to her parents safe and sound. "We don't know how to thank you, young man," said Cami Jo's father.

"It's nothing really," replied Jason, shrugging his shoulders. "It was the right thing to do.

"You really know how to handle a horse," her father continued.

"Thank you. I grew up riding on the reservation in Cripple Creek."

“Are you a part of the horse training the reservation is exhibiting there next spring out at Angel Ridge ranch?”

“Yes, sir, I am,” answered Jason.

“Well then, we look forward to joining you.” The man tipped his cowboy hat. “See you then.”

Isabel looked at Jason and thought she would burst with admiration. He rode Thunder like a champ and rescued Cami Jo. He was so brave.

You An annoying voice scratched her ears. “It’s such a shame the Native American Association is losing some of its grant money,” hissed a woman in a yellow hat walking by.

Isabel perked up her ears. “Jason, did you hear that?”

“Hear what?” asked Jason.

Oh no, it can't be! Isabel turned to find the woman in the yellow hat, but she'd vanished in the crowd. She rushed to the corral fence and jumped up on the rail to search for her. But there were too many people.

Isabel shook her head and stuck her fingers in her ears. "Maybe I'm hearing things," she said to Jason. "I thought I heard someone say that the NAA was losing some of their grant money."

"The money you're getting for holding the horse training at your ranch?" asked Jason.

Isabel paced back and forth. "Uh-huh. It would ruin everything if we don't get it." She glanced up. The woman in the yellow hat had stopped to buy a snow cone at the booth next to the corral fence.

"Oh, Jason, there she is!" cried Isabel. She raced over to the gray-haired woman. "Excuse me ma'am. I thought, I uh . . .

overheard you say that the NAA might lose their grant money.” She twisted her chestnut braids. “It’s kind of important to me. Is that what you said?” Isabel hoped with all her might that it was *not* what the woman had said.

“Why, yes dear, it’s a rumor I heard.” She leaned toward Isabel and lowered her voice. “Bad economy you know.”

Isabel cleared her throat. “A rumor, ma’am?”

The woman put her finger on her chin thoughtfully. “Someone I know from my country club heard it from someone who works at the beauty salon, who heard it from someone’s daughter that works at the governor’s house. Yes, that’s it.”

Isabel knew about rumors. Sometimes they were wrong, and sometimes they were right. She sighed. “Thank you, ma’am.” *Which is it this time, wrong or right?*

“What does this mean?” asked Jason.

Isabel’s knees felt wobbly. “We’ll only have to sell the ranch, *all* the horses, and move to town if we don’t get the grant, that’s all. My whole life, *poof!* Over! I can’t even think about it!”

Jason put his hand on Isabel’s shoulder and looked her straight in the eye. “Grandmother Tabitha always says, ‘Trust the Great Spirit. Even though foes may come, He will fight for us.’”

Isabel’s brain was swirling. “I gotta go, Jason. I gotta find my mom and dad. Maybe they know something.” She trotted off and shouted over her shoulder, “See you later!”



But her parents didn’t know *anything*.

“No news is good news, Isabel,” said Mom. “Let’s keep our hopes up.”

“And prayers,” added Dad.

What was God's plan in all of this? Isabel didn't know. Her heart was getting attached to her newfound Native American family and she never, *ever* wanted to leave them.

Review from Meadow Rue Merrill

As fun to read as they are inspiring, the books in Jan May's *New Millennium Girls* series will delight girls and their families. In *Isabel's Fun-Fair Fiasco*, May's exciting sequel to *Isabel's Secret*, twelve-year-old Isabel Morningsky and her friends try to make life better for those living at the local Native American Reservation, but not everyone seems pleased.

Working together, Morningsky and her friends collect clues to discover who is trying to sabotage their efforts and discover that with determination and God's help, anything is possible. For extra fun, children are sure to enjoy the crafts and recipes at the end of the book. My daughter loved the whole series! – *Meadow Rue Merrill, author of The Christmas Cradle, The Backward Easter Egg Hunt and more picture-books that take place at Lantern Hill Farm (RoseKidz).*

For any girl who loves horses, fairs, and best friends! Perfect stocking stuffers!

***Isabel's Fun Fair Fiasco* comes separately, in a [reading bundle](#), in a [literature study bundle](#), or [language pack](#).**

Use CODE TOS20 on ALL PURCHASES Through December 31



Callie's Contest of Courage

The New
Millennium Girls



Jan May

The New
Millennium Girls

Callie's Contest of Courage

by

Jan May

New Millennium Girl Books

Callie's Contest of Courage by Jan May

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*For military families everywhere,
who sacrifice in so many ways
for our freedom
every day-
Thank You!*

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Chapter One

Team Fleming

Callie squeezed her dad's arm as they huddled together on the beach blanket. "I love waiting with you for the sea turtles to hatch, Daddy."

Dad put his arm around her. "Look up there. There's nothing like the twinkling stars in the sky, is there?"

She gazed up at the milky night sky and inhaled the balmy sea air. "There's no other place I'd rather be on the whole earth!"

"Camera ready?" Dad asked.

Callie patted the camera on her lap. "Camera ready." She knew they had to be quiet and use a night lens to take pictures. Any light might confuse the baby sea turtles, who must follow the natural light of the horizon and the white foam of the waves to find their way to the sea.

Dad looked at her with an approving gaze. "I think some special girl will be an award-winning photographer very soon."

Callie beamed. "Just like you, Dad. I hope I win the contest and get my picture published in *Kid's Animal World Magazine*. My website could go national!" Callie's stomach fluttered with butterflies. "Just a couple more months and I'll send my entry in. I couldn't have done it without you."

She crawled over to the bundle of sea grass surrounded by the yellow ribbon fence protecting the turtle eggs. *It's amazing how well I can see by only the light of the moon.*

"I think I hear something," Callie whispered. Her eyes spotted several tiny brown turtles poking their heads up through the sand. Her face lit up. "Aw, hello there," she whispered, bending down. "You three shall be named Joe, Kevin, and Nick." She giggled. "The turtle brothers. You guys will make big news on my Critter Connection website." She motioned with her hand. "Now, scuttle out to sea."

She held up her camera and snapped several pictures. "Can I follow this batch to the sea, Daddy, and chase away the birds?" She picked up several rocks in case she needed them. No way would she let a bunch of hungry seagulls swoop down and eat these baby turtles.

"Yep."

Callie heard Dad snapping picture after

picture as she followed the baby sea turtles through the sand. After watching “Joe,” “Kevin,” and “Nick” safely splash into the foamy water, she ran back to watch for the next batch to hatch.

“Dad, look! Here’s four, five, six, and seven!” Callie hovered over the tiny turtles like a mother hen hovering over a batch of chicks. She grinned. “I love this time of year.” She sighed. “Did you know that scientists believe each baby turtle is born with an internal compass that leads them out of their shell, up through the sand, and out to sea? The mother turtle could have laid two hundred eggs here!”

Dad nodded, smiling slyly. “Yes, I think I remember reading that somewhere. Could it have been on Callie’s Critter Connection?”

“Oh, Dad! You know it was. It probably took this batch two to three whole days just to climb up from their shells buried in the sand.” Callie sat back on her heels and gazed out at the beach. A heavy feeling dropped into the pit of her stomach, chasing the excitement away.

“What’s the matter, honey?” Dad asked. He reached over and gently brushed a lock of hair from her eyes.

“This moment would be practically perfect except for . . . except for . . .” In all the fun of spending the evening with Dad, watching the sea turtles hatch, she had almost forgotten. She looked up and bit her lip.

"Except for what?"

"Do you really have to go overseas tomorrow?"

"You know the drill, Callie. A Marine has to be ready whenever his country calls. *Semper Fi.*"

"I know, 'always faithful,'" she said, looking down.

"You and Curt love our country and want us Marines to help keep it safe, right?"

"Yes."

Dad flexed his arm. "Then it's time to be courageous and use our faith muscles. You, Mom, and Curt are going to pray Psalm 91 for me, right? I'm counting on you."

Callie threw herself into her father's big, strong arms and hugged him tight. "You know we will!" *I always feel safe in your arms, Daddy. Now you're going far away to fight to help others feel safe too. What will I do when you're gone?*

"You're my hero, Dad," Callie whispered in his ear. "But what about the 'I Love Nature' photo contest? We were going to work on it together. I really want to win that internship at the zoo this fall."

"I have faith in you, sweetheart. You're a good photographer all on your own now. I think you'll snap a winning photo essay."

Callie wrinkled her nose and kicked the sand. She wasn't so sure. "Can we Skype and work on it together while you're away?"

| “Of course we can.” He looked at her with adoration in his ocean--blue eyes. “My little girl’s growing up.”

Callie stood and put her hands on her hips. “Seriously, Dad.”

He held his hand up for a high-five. “Team Fleming?”

She slapped his hand. “Team Fleming! Look, the little turtles are scuttling out to sea.”

Dad stood up and held his hand out to grasp hers. “Let’s follow this batch together.”



Later that night before bed, Callie and her younger brother, Curt, sat on the couch in the family room.

Dad stood in front of them. “Time for Team Fleming to put our family plan into action.”

“Right,” said Mom, holding up a calendar. “Here are the days that mark Dad’s deployment. Callie, you come up first and add the days that are special for you in pink.”

Callie liked this part. She loved to use markers and stickers to decorate the calendar and count up the days until Dad’s return. She picked out the pink marker and wrote in large letters: **MARINE KIDS**

INTERNSHIP across the second week in June.

Dad smiled. "You'll love it, Callie. You can Skype me and tell me all about it."

"I will, Daddy. I'm so excited!" squealed Callie. Then she took out an orange marker and drew a big circle around July 1. She took a sticker of a camera out and stuck it in the circle.

"I know that date," said Dad. "It's the deadline for sending in your photo-contest entry."

"Yep," Callie said, pursing her lips. "How can I ever win without you?"

"I know it seems hard, honey, but you have a good chance of winning," said Dad, "even without me. Just remember all we've done together. And I have a surprise."

"What?" asked Callie, jumping inside.

Dad reached into a bag and pulled out his camera. "You can use my camera while I'm gone. You're older and more responsible now. I know you will take good care of it."

Callie couldn't believe her eyes. *Maybe this deployment won't be so bad after all. If I can't have my dad, at least I can have his camera!* "I can use the super-telephoto lens. I know I'll get a good shot with that. Oh, thank you, Daddy!" Callie threw her arms around his broad shoulders. "And this is what I have for you." She pulled a photo out of her pocket.

Dad beamed. "It's you and me with the baby turtles."

Callie choked up and nodded. "Keep it close to your heart, Daddy, and come back to us soon."

"I will." Dad took off his red San Francisco 49ers sweatshirt and held it out. "And this is for Curt."

"Awesome!" Curt bounded over to Dad and shouted, "Put it on me, Daddy!" He raised his arms, and Dad slipped the sweatshirt ~~trt~~ over his head. Curt held up his favorite toy airplane. "And this is for you. Go help the good guys, Daddy!"

Dad hugged Curt and Callie tight. "You're the best family a guy could have. I'll be back before you know it."

Callie kissed Dad's cheek and held on to him very tight. She wanted to think about all the good things he would do in the world—how he would fight for freedom, peace, and the fair treatment of all people. But she couldn't help feeling like he was letting her down. Even though she had Dad's camera, she wasn't sure about it. She needed *him* for the contest!

"Okay, troops," said Mom. "Time for family reading."

Curt snuggled up next to Mom and looked at Dad with his big, blue eyes. "What are you going to read tonight, Daddy?" he asked.

Dad opened his leather Bible and sat down beside them. "The story of a brave shepherd boy named David."

"I love that one," Callie said, pulling up her knees under her nightgown.

"Now the Philistines gathered their forces against Israel to attack them. Three of David's brothers were already at the battle lines. 'Take this roasted grain and loaves of bread to them,' said his father, 'and find out if they are safe.'

"When David arrived at the camp, a giant warrior marched out of the Philistine camp. He was nine feet tall, wearing a bronze helmet, and his coat of armor shone in the afternoon sun. 'Who will fight me?' he roared."

Curt sat, wide-eyed, on the edge of the couch. "Was he a superhero?"

"He was a super *villain* named Goliath," answered Dad. "The Israelite army cowered when they heard him and ran away. All but one."

"Was it David?" Curt asked.

"Dad nodded. "Yes, he knew God was with him, so he wasn't afraid."

Callie was thoughtful. "Was David born with all that faith and courage?"

Dad's eyes shone. "No. He started out with just a little faith. Once a hungry lion came while David watched his father's sheep at night."

"What happened?" asked Curt.

"David had a choice to make. Either stand up with courage to protect the sheep or run away and hide and let the sheep be eaten. David chose to stand

up with courage, and he chased the lion away.”

“Cool,” Callie said, smiling.

“Then, on another day, a hungry bear tried to eat a sheep. Once again, David had to choose to trust God to give him more courage.”

Curt stood up and beat the air with his fists. “Did he fight the bear?”

“Yes, he did,” said Dad. “God gave him strength to do it.”

Callie reached her arm around Dad’s neck and looked into his eyes. “So, God gave David *little* tests to build his courage muscles, so when the giant Goliath test came he would be ready?”

“That’s right,” said Dad.

Curt’s eyes fluttered as he began to doze off.

Mom smiled. “Looks like it’s bedtime.”

Dad picked up Curt to carry him to bed. “Come on, sweetheart,” he said to Callie.

Callie yawned, but she didn’t want family time to end. She wanted to stay snuggled up to Dad and hear more about David’s bravery. She kissed Mom good night and padded down the hallway.



Early the next morning, Callie felt a nudge on her shoulder.

"I want to say good-bye," Dad whispered in her ear. He sat on the edge of her bed in his camouflage uniform. He had a serious look on his face. "Listen to Mom and help her with Curt."

"But, Dad," Callie protested, "he can be so annoying when you're gone. He can be such a little pest sometimes!"

He gave Callie his you're-the-oldest look and nodded towards the Bible on her nightstand.

Callie let out a deep breath. "I know, I know. Love your enemy."

Dad raised his eyebrows. "I was thinking more like, 'Do unto others.' That's the problem, Callie. You have to stop looking at Curt as the enemy."

Callie twisted her blond curls. "Dad, he breaks my stuff, he follows me and my friends all around, and he won't leave me alone."

"He just wants your attention. You two *used* to get along."

Callie rolled her eyes. "But I'm older now, and I need my space."

"Have your space some other time," Dad said, frowning slightly. "This is an important time to pull together. No fighting while I'm on deployment, okay?" He tousled her hair. "Sergeant's orders."

Callie chewed her lip and reluctantly nodded.

"What's our verse?"

"With my God I can run through a troop and leap over a wall," Callie said. "Nothing is too hard for

Him.”

Dad put his arms around her and squeezed. Then he stood and smiled down at her. “That’s my courageous girl.”

Callie smiled faintly back and waved as Dad left the room. She loved her country but couldn’t help feeling worried every time he went overseas. She held her belly. *I’m trying to have courage, so why is my stomach doing flip-flops?*

Callie rolled over, pulling her pillow over her head. “God, I think I’m going to need an *ocean* of courage this time.” She thought for a minute. “No, cancel that. I need a miracle.”

Review

"I believe girls as young as 6 will eagerly read the book with someone. My daughter loved this book! It nurtured her faith in Christ." Tracey Masters, homeschool parent

"I'm always on the lookout for positive, adventurous books for my kids - especially ones with characters who possess a strong and growing faith. Unfortunately, those are not very easy to find. But recently I hit the jackpot when Jan May sent me a copy of her newly released book, Callie's Contest of Courage, and I was most impressed." ~Amy Bradsher, Homeschool Parent and Blogger at Nest in the Rock

Callie's book also comes in a [Reading Bundle](#), [Literature Bundle](#), [Language Bundle](#)



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Callie's Zany Zoo

Christmas

Jan May

Callie's Zany Zoo Christmas

by Jan May

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Callie's Zany Zoo Christmas...Coming Soon!

Callie slipped her binoculars over her blonde curls. *It's cool having the beach in my own backyard.*

She could wake up and build a sandcastle, or go swimming any time she wanted, if the water was warm enough. She could hunt for shells and find a starfish to add to her collection. On some days, she

might even save her brother from a sea monster. At least that's what *he* thought.

A tingle ran down Callie's spine as she dashed toward the beach. *What dolphin species will I see today?* She would take a photo and pin it on her *I love dolphins* poster. She was amazed that there were eleven kinds of dolphins. Maybe she would sight a Bottlenose dolphin, *Tursiops truncatus* or *Turvey topseys*.

"Come on squirt," she called over her shoulder to her little brother. She cleared her throat, "I mean *Curt*."

Sister and brother shuffled through the warm sand. Callie tugged the strap of her swimsuit. It was a perfectly sunny late November day in southern California. Curt slowed down to pick up his lost flip-flop.

“Hurry up!” Callie inhaled the salty sea air. She could hardly wait to get to her favorite place! “Okay, you know the routine. I’ll walk you up to the waves but then you’re on your own.”

Curt frowned.

“Don’t worry. I got my eye on you, squirt. I want to see if there are any animals I can post on my *Callie’s Critter Connection* before I come swimming.”

Last year in school, Callie had created her *Callie’s Critter Connection* website for a science project. Dad was a huge help giving her advice on how to set it up and which photos were the best to post. Maybe this would help her become a zoologist someday.

Curt splashed into the water. “Okay. But hurry up!”

Callie rolled her eyes. *Why is he always so annoying?* She ignored Curt's command and lifted her binoculars to her eyes. A sailboat with blue-striped sails glided across the water, like a treasure ship sailing across the world. *I wonder where they are coming from. Spices from India? The newest electronics from Japan? Doll clothes from China?*

Chilly waves splashed ashore, covering Callie's bare toes. A tide pool! She jogged over. Hermit crabs clicked in the watery sand pool.

"Hello, little guys." She adjusted her binoculars, watching as they dug into the sand. She walked her fingers along the sand like a crab looking for an empty shell to live in.

Hmm. She studied it a little closer. Pagurus samuelis. Or Paggie Sammies as I like to

call them. Callie chuckled. She loved giving nicknames to the animal species she found. It made her feel like a real grown-up scientist and helped her keep them straight when explaining them to others.

She remembered Curt and quickly glanced around to see where he was. He was safely on his boogie board riding the waves. *Good. Back to my observations.*

She lifted her binoculars and scanned the ocean. “Now, where are those dolphins?” Maybe she could swim out and see if they were friendly, so she could practice the dolphin whistles she’d learned at sea camp.

Just then, she spotted something else. “Seals!” She jogged down the beach a little way to get a better look. “Ah yes, the *Zalophus Californianus*, also known as the California Sea Lion — AKA Zallie Callies.”

Callie giggled as she watched two baby seals and their mother playing in the water. Their gazes caught her and their big brown eyes seemed to smile at her. She clicked several pictures. Her heart warmed as she remembered helping to rescue the baby sea lion Sadie last year, when her flipper got caught in a fisherman's net.

At last, Callie spotted it! A dorsal fin gliding across the shining water. "Awesome, a dolphin!" She adjusted her binoculars to get a better look. "Uh-oh!" She caught her breath. That's no dolphin. It's a shark!"

Where's Curt?

"Curt!" she hollered, waving her arms. "Get out of the water! Code red! Code red!"

Curt turned and looked at Callie, wide-eyed. He catapulted toward shore like he was being shot out of a cannon.

She rushed to the shore as Curt bolted from the water, panting. She tugged him by the hand. "Come on! Let's report this to the lifeguard."

Callie rushed up to the lifeguard stand. "Ty! shark. Fifty feet down the beach. From the looks of it, I'd say it's a mako."

Tyler sprang up and clutched his megaphone. "Thanks, Callie. Good work. Red flag! Everyone out of the water! Red flag!"

As soon as Callie and Curt reached home, she scurried to her room. She had pinned every shark sighting this year on her *Sharks of the World* poster. She took a blue pushpin off her desk and pinned it near her

beach. Then she dashed to the den and booted up the computer. She typed in www.OAA.com

Callie clicked: Report Shark Sighting.

She liked being a part of the Ocean Animal Awareness group in her neighborhood. She saluted the OAA flag. "Callie Fleming, oceanographer on duty!" It made her feel important, keeping her beach safe.

Curt's voice trailed down the hall, relaying his shark encounter to mom. "It was a shark 100 feet long!" he blurted, and he was right on my tail. I stared into his cold black eyes and said 'You're not going to have me for dinner!' So I kicked him with my big flippers and escaped!"

Callie shook her head. *Little boys' imaginations!*

Minutes later, Curt padded into the den. "Look what came in the mail."

Callie's fingers clicked on the keyboard. "Let me type this last thing. There." She pushed "submit" and whirled around in her chair. "What you got?"

Curt's eyes twinkled. "The Christmas catalog!"

Being the end of November, Curt and Callie officially kicked off the Christmas season to search for the best toys.

"I'll get the markers." Callie grabbed them off the desk. "Let's go into the living room."

Curt dove on the couch and bounced "I can't wait to get all the new building block

sets." He jumped higher. And a new bike!
And one of those new laser guns ..."

Callie nestled on the loveseat across from him and sent him her big-sister glare, that said, "*Stop jumping on the couch or I'll tell Mom.*"

Curt stopped jumping and plopped on his bottom. Callie scooted next to him. "I'm so excited for Christmas. I hope I get an iPad." She didn't always get along with Curt, but when it came to Christmas banded together.

Dad had been at the army base all day and walked in the front door wearing his khaki military uniform. "How are my little troopers doing?"

Curt ran to him and leaped into his arms. "We saw a gigantic shark. Dad, it almost ate me!"

Dad looked alarmed. "What's this?"

"He's exaggerating, Dad. The shark was fifty feet away. I called Curt out right away and reported it. I think from the photos I took that it was a mako! *Isurus oxyrinchus* or *Issus Oxicallis*. The fastest shark in the world. Probably looking for a swordfish lunch."

Dad patted her shoulder proudly. "That's my girl!"

Curt looked up at Dad with his big blue eyes. "Daddy, tell us a story."

Callie rushed over and threw her arms around Dad. "Yes, please tell us a

story." She sat on the couch, pulling her knees up to her chest. Dad sat next to her, took off his hat, and set down his briefcase. Curt snuggled beside them.

"It's a little early, but okay." As Dad reached for his Bible, a flutter of excitement beat in Callie's chest. There was always a good story in there.

Dad opened it and read, "Jesus was teaching the multitudes, and He said, 'The greatest commandments are these: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind, and all your strength and love your neighbor as yourself.'"

"Loving my neighbor is easy," said Curt. "Sammy's my best friend."

Callie was glad the verses didn't mean people at school. She didn't want to love Zach Rodgers. No way. He was a bully. "What about all the other people? Does Jesus want me to love them too?"

"Let's keep reading," said Dad. "I think it will answer your question. 'There was a man who rode a donkey to Jerusalem but on the way, robbers came and beat him and stole all of his possessions. The man lay there bleeding and crying out for help. A very religious man walked by and crossed to the other side of the road. He said, 'I am too holy to touch this man, I'll get all dirty.''"

Callie furrowed her brow in anger. "It's just the kind of person that should've helped."

“I think so too,” said Dad. “Why do you think he didn’t want to help the man?”

“Because he didn't want to get his clothes dirty?” asked Curt.

Dad smiled. “Good answer.”

“What if he was late for something?” said Callie. “Sometimes you can't help me when I need something because you're late for your assignment on base.”

Dad looked thoughtful. “Hmm. He didn't want to help the bruised man because he was proud.” He continued reading, “Then came a despised Samaritan. Samaritans weren’t supposed to talk to Jews. But when He heard the man crying his heart felt sad and he had compassion.”

“What’s com-passion?” asked Curt.

“It’s love in action,” said Dad. “Not just hoping the man gets help but doing something about it. So, do you know what the Samaritan did?”

Curt looked wide-eyed and shook his head.

“He bandaged up the man's wounds and laid him on his own donkey and took care of him. Which man fulfilled the great commandment to love their neighbor as themselves?”

“Even though they didn’t live in the same neighborhood,” said Callie thoughtfully, “it was the man who took the time to be kind to him.”

“Even if he was late,” said Curt, “he didn’t care. The bruised man was more important.”

Dad’s eyes shone. “That’s right. We should always be ready like the good Samaritan to help those in need wherever we see them. Even if it’s not convenient.”

“I like that story,” said Callie. She tucked the thoughts into her heart. She would keep a look-out for someone in need.

“What happened to the donkey?” asked Curt. “They sure did a lot of good things back in those days didn’t they, Daddy?”

“Uh-huh. They also carried a special mother who was going to have a baby.”

Callie’s eyes sparkled. “Jesus!”

“I can see you two are thinking about Christmas,” said Dad.

Curt crawled up into Dad's lap. He gave his father a puppy-dog face with his big blue eyes and a puffy lips. “I really, really, *really* want the supersonic jet that goes *Bang! Bang! Boom!*”

Callie scooted over and sat on Dad's other knee. She threw her arms around his neck and gave him her puppy-dog look too. “I was looking on Computers R-Us today, and I saw the most *wonderful* iPad. I could do so many things with it for my website. It's the perfect gift for a soon-to-be twelve-year-old, don't you think?”

“Uh-oh,” said Dad squirming, “I think I need reinforcements. Grace! SOS! Can you come in here, please?”

Mom walked into the room with her hair in a ponytail wiping her hands on a dishtowel.

“Please, Mommy,” begged Curt, “can we have lots of presents this year?”

Dad shot Mom the look of surrender.

Mom sat next to Dad on the couch. “I know kids get excited about these things and that's okay. But you both know that Christmas is more than just getting presents. We want to keep the focus on the greatest gift God gave us in his Son Jesus more than anything.”

Callie sighed and twisted her hair. *I know Mom's right. But I really want that iPad.*

“So, because of that, I wanted to talk to you kids about something,” said Mom.

Callie nodded with excitement.

Maybe it means more presents!

“This year, instead of doing our regular Advent calendar, we are going to do a service project Advent calendar called ‘God’s Angels on Assignment.’”

“Awww, no chocolate?” whined Curt.

“What kind of project?” asked Callie. She liked projects.

Mom brought out a poster with a Christmas tree on it. “First, we color the tree together. Then we pull a slip of paper out of this jar to get our Advent Angel Assignments. Angels are God’s helpers, so we will be too.”

“Can I draw first?” asked Callie.

Mom nodded and held out the jar for her.

Callie stuck her hand in the jar and pulled out a slip of paper. "Oh cool! They're shaped like Christmas ornaments. This one says, 'Be the Light of the World by brightening someone's day. Help someone who needs help decorating with lights.'"

"Yay!" shouted Curt. "I like lights."

Callie thought for a minute. "But who?"

"What about Mrs. Whitley across the street?" said Mom. "She just broke her hip. She usually puts her lights up right after Thanksgiving, but I noticed she doesn't have any lights on her house yet."

"That's a whole week late," said Callie. "Curt and I will go over first thing in the morning."

Dad smiled and nodded his approval.

Mom set a craft box with colored pencils and glitter on the family room table. “Dinner is still forty minutes away. If you want, you two can get started. Let’s tape the tree poster here on the door after you color it.”

Curt and Callie flew to the table. Dad scooted a chair next to Callie. “I want to help too.”

All three of them worked hard coloring the tree poster and Callie colored the little ornament that said, “Be the Light of the World.”

With each stroke of glitter glue, excitement bubbled in Callie’s heart. This just might be a different kind of Christmas. Even though she really, really wanted that iPad, she sensed there was something more

important going on, something bigger than herself, something she could almost . . . *feel*.

It felt very much like . . . a Christmas adventure was about to begin!

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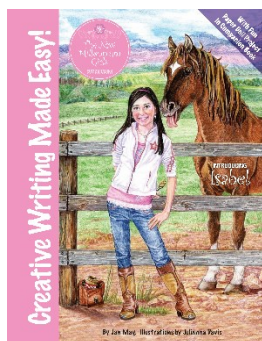
About the Author

Jan May loved homeschooling her two children through high school. Whether it was attending re-enactments of the Revolutionary War or collecting an amphibian zoo, hands-on education was always at the forefront of her curriculum. She is author of the *Creative Writing Made Easy* series that engages even the most reluctant writers. All the books are filled with fun interactive language activities involving each type of learner: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic—perfect for the wiggle in boys. Having been a creative writing teacher for over fifteen years, she believes that given the right tools, every child can learn to write and love it!



Visit her website for fun activities. Watch her online teaching schedule—leading students and teens in a fun and engaging writing experience.

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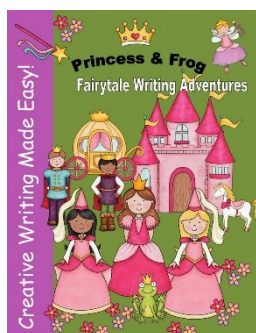


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