



HER
MOTHER'S
HOPE

FRANCINE
RIVERS



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Her Mother's Hope

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For Shannon and Andrea

Acknowledgments

Most of the novel you are about to read is purely fictional, though there are bits and pieces of personal family history woven throughout. The manuscript has taken various forms over the last two years, and in the end morphed into a saga. Many people have helped me in the process of writing the stories of Marta and Hildemara in this first volume and Carolyn and May Flower Dawn in the second. I want to thank each and every one of them.

First of all my husband, Rick, has ridden the storm through this one, listening to every variation of the stories as the characters took form in my imagination and acting as my first editor.

Every family needs a historian, and my brother, Everett, has played that role to perfection. He sent me hundreds of family pictures that helped flesh out the story. I also received invaluable help from my cousin Maureen Rosiere, who described in detail our grandparents' almond and wine-grape ranch, a pattern I used in this novel. Both my husband and my brother shared their Vietnam experiences with me.

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information on the Internet faster! Whenever I ran into a wall, Holly tore it down. Thanks, Holly!

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Kurt Thiel and Robert Schwinn answered questions about Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship. Keep up the good work, gentlemen!

Globus tour guide Joppy Wissink rerouted a bus so that Rick and I had the opportunity to walk around my grandmother's hometown of Steffisburg, Switzerland.

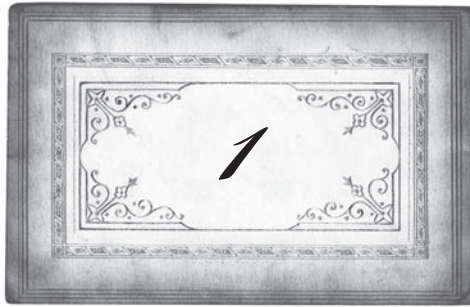
All along the course of this project, I have had brainstorming partners when I needed them. Colleen Phillips raised questions and encouraged me from the beginning. Robin Lee Hatcher and Sunni Jeffers jumped in with ideas and questions when I didn't know which way to go. My agent, Danielle Egan-Miller, and her associate, Joanna MacKenzie, helped me see how to restructure the novel to show the story I wanted to tell.

I would also like to thank Karen Watson of Tyndale House Publishers for her insights and encouraging support. She helped me see my characters more clearly. And, of course, every writer needs a good editor. I am blessed with one of the best, Kathy Olson. She makes revision work exciting and challenging rather than painful.

Finally, I thank the Lord for my mother and grandmother. Their lives and Mom's journals first inspired the idea of writing about mother-daughter relationships. They were both hardworking women of faith. They both passed on some years ago, but I cling to the promise that they are still very much alive and undoubtedly enjoying one another's company. One day I will see them again.



Marta



STEFFISBURG, SWITZERLAND, 1901

Marta usually loved Sundays. It was the only day Papa closed the tailor shop and Mama had a rest. The family dressed in their finest clothes and walked to church, Papa and Mama ahead, Marta's older brother, Hermann, behind them, and Marta and her younger sister, Elise, bringing up the rear. Usually other families joined them along the way. Marta would watch eagerly for her best friend, Rosie Gilgan, who'd run down the hill to join her and walk the rest of the way to the old Romanesque church with its arches mortared shut and the white clock tower.

Today, Marta hung her head, wishing she could run away and hide among the pines and alders while the townsfolk gathered for services. She could sit on her favorite fallen tree and ask God why Papa despised her so much and seemed so set on making her suffer. Today, she wouldn't have complained if Papa had told her to stay home and work in the shop alone and not step foot outside the door for a week, though it would take longer than that for the bruises to fade.

Despite evidence of the beating he had given her, Papa insisted everyone attend services. She wore a knitted cap and kept her chin down, hoping no one would notice. It wasn't the first time she had borne the marks of his anger. When people came close, Marta shifted the woolen scarf or turned her face away.

When they came into the churchyard, Papa sent Mama ahead with Elise and Hermann. He caught Marta by the elbow and spoke into her ear. "You'll sit in back."

"People will want to know why."

"And I'll tell them the truth. You're being punished for defying me." His fingers dug in painfully, but she refused to utter a sound of pain. "Keep your head down. No one wants to see your ugly face." He let go of her and went inside.

Fighting tears, Marta went in alone and stepped into the last row of straight-backed chairs.

She watched her father join Mama. When he glanced back, she tucked her chin quickly, looking up again only after he had seated himself. Her sister, Elise, looked back over her shoulder, face far too pale and strained for a child. Mama leaned close, whispering, and Elise turned face-forward again. Hermann sat between Mama and Papa, his head turning to the right and left. No doubt he was looking for friends and would disappear as soon as the services ended.

Rosie passed by and sat near the front. The Gilgans had eight children and took up an entire row. Rosie glanced toward Marta's mother and father, then back. Marta hid behind Herr Becker, sitting in front of her. She waited briefly and peered around the baker again.

All the murmuring stopped when the minister stepped into the pulpit. He opened the service with prayer. Joining with the congregation, Marta said the prayer of confession, and she heard the minister's assurance of God's mercy and forgiveness. As the creed and Scriptures were read, Marta let her mind drift like the snow blowing across the Alpine meadows above Steffisburg. She imagined herself spreading her arms like wings and letting the white swirling flakes lift and carry her wherever God willed.

And where would that be? she wondered.

The minister's voice rose as he preached. He always said the same thing, but used different words, different examples from the Bible. "*Strive harder. Faith is dead without good works. Do not become complacent. Those who turn their backs on God are destined for hell.*"

Was God like Papa, never satisfied no matter how hard she tried? Papa believed in God, but when had he ever shown her mercy? And if he believed God created everyone, then what right had Papa to complain over how tall she was, how thin, how white her skin, how large her hands and feet? Her father cursed her because she passed the school examinations "and made Hermann look a fool!"

She'd tried to defend herself. She should have known better. "Hermann doesn't apply himself. He'd rather hike in the hills than do his studies."

Papa came after her. Mama tried to get between, but he shoved her roughly aside. "You think you can talk to me like that and get away with it?" Marta raised her arm to protect herself, but it did no good.

"Johann, don't!" Mama cried out.

Still gripping Marta's arm, he turned on Mama. "Don't you tell me—"

"How many times must we turn the other cheek, Papa?" Something white-hot rose up inside Marta when he threatened Mama.

That's when he used his fist on her. He let go of her abruptly and stood over her. "She made me do it. You heard her! A father can't tolerate insolence in his own home!"

Marta didn't know she'd fainted until Mama stroked the hair back from her face. "Be still, Marta. Elise is getting a wet cloth." Marta could hear Elise crying. "Papa's gone to the tanner. He won't be back for a while." Mama took the cloth Elise held out. Marta sucked in her breath when Mama dabbed her split lip. "You shouldn't provoke your father."

"So it's my fault."

"I didn't say that."

"I pass the examination with the highest marks in school and get a beating for it. Where's Hermann? Strolling along on some mountain trail?"

Mama cupped her cheek. "You must forgive your father. He lost his temper. He didn't know what he was doing."

Mama always made excuses for him, just as Papa made excuses for Hermann. No one made excuses for her.

"*Forgive,*" Mama said. "*Seventy times seven. Forgive!*"

Marta's mouth twisted as the minister spoke of God the Father. She wished God was like Mama instead.

When the service ended, Marta waited until Papa motioned her to join the family. Head down, she fell into step beside Elise.

"Johann Schneider!"

Papa turned at Herr Gilgan's voice. The two men shook hands and talked. Hermann took advantage of the distraction to join some friends heading up the hill. Mama took Elise's hand when Frau Gilgan joined them.

"Where have you been all week?" Rosie spoke softly and Marta turned. Rosie gasped softly. "Oh, Marta." She moaned in sympathy. "Again? What was his reason this time?"

"School."

"But you passed the examination!"

"Hermann didn't."

"But that's not fair."

Marta lifted one shoulder and gave Rosie a bleak smile. "It does no good to tell him so." Rosie would never be able to understand. *Her* father adored her. Herr Gilgan adored all his children. They all worked together in the running of *Hotel Edelweiss*, encouraging one another in everything. They teased one another with good-natured humor, but never mocked or belittled anyone. If one of them had a difficulty, the others lovingly closed ranks around him and helped.

Sometimes Marta envied her friend. Every member of the Gilgan family would finish school. The boys would serve their two

years in the Swiss Army and then go off to university in Bern or Zurich. Rosie and her sisters would learn fine cuisine and the art of running a large household that embraced up to thirty outsiders. She would be tutored in French, English, and Italian. If Rosie had further aspirations, her father wouldn't deny her simply because she was a girl. He would send her to university along with her brothers.

"You've been in school long enough," Papa had declared when he came back from the tanner. "You're old enough to carry your share of the financial burden."

Begging him for one more year of school had done no good at all.

Tears filled Marta's eyes. "Papa said it's enough that I can read, write, and do arithmetic."

"But you're only twelve, and if anyone in our class should make it to the university, it would be you."

"There will be no university for me. Papa said I'm done with school."

"But why?"

"Papa says too much school fills a girl's head with nonsense." By *nonsense* Papa meant ambition. Marta burned with it. Marta had hoped that with enough schooling, she would have choices about what to do with her life. Papa said school had puffed her up and she needed to be brought down to where she belonged.

Rosie took Marta's hand. "Maybe he'll change his mind and let you come back to school. I'm sure Herr Scholz will want to talk to him about it."

Herr Scholz might try, but her father wouldn't listen. Once he made up his mind, not even an avalanche would change it. "It'll do no good, Rosie."

"What will you do now?"

"Papa plans to hire me out."

"*Marta!*"

Marta jumped at Papa's bellowing voice. Scowling, he motioned sharply for her to come. Rosie didn't let go of her hand as they joined their families.

Frau Gilgan stared at Marta. “What happened to your face?” She cast an angry look at Papa.

Papa stared back at her. “She fell down the stairs.” Papa gave Marta a look of warning. “She’s always been clumsy. Just look at those big hands and feet.”

Frau Gilgan’s dark eyes snapped. “She’ll grow into them.” Her husband put his hand beneath her elbow.

Mama held out her hand to Marta. “Come along. Elise is cold. We need to go home.” Elise huddled close to Mama’s side, not looking at anyone.

Rosie hugged Marta and whispered, “I’ll ask Papa to hire you!”

Marta didn’t dare hope her father would agree—he knew how much she would enjoy working for the Gilgans.

Papa went out that afternoon and didn’t return home until late in the evening. He smelled of beer and seemed quite pleased with himself. “Marta!” He slapped his hand on the table. “I have found work for you.”

She would work for the Beckers at the bakery every morning. “You must be there by four in the morning.” She would spend three afternoons a week working for the Zimmers. The doctor thought his wife would welcome some freedom from tending their fractious new baby. “And Frau Fuchs says she can use you to tend her hives. It’s getting colder, and she’ll be ready to harvest the honey soon. You’ll work nights as long as she needs you.” He leaned back in his chair. “And you’ll work at *Hotel Edelweiss* two days a week.” He watched her face closely. “Don’t think you’re going to have tea and cookies with your little friend anymore. You’re there to work. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Papa.” Marta clasped her hands in front of her, trying not to show her pleasure.

“And don’t ask for anything. Not from any of them. Herr Becker will pay in bread, Frau Fuchs in honey when the time comes. As to the others, they will settle with me and not you.”

Heat spread through Marta’s limbs, surging up her neck into her cheeks and burning there like lava beneath pale earth. “Am I to receive nothing, Papa? nothing at all?”

“You receive a roof over your head and food on your plate. You receive clothes on your back. As long as you live in my house, whatever you make rightfully belongs to me.” He turned his head away. “Anna!” he shouted at Mama. “Are you done with that dress for Frau Keller yet?”

“I’m working on it now, Johann.”

Scowling, Papa shouted again. “She expects delivery by the end of the week! If you don’t have it ready by then, she’ll take her business to another dressmaker!” Papa jerked his head. “Go help your mother.”

Marta joined Mama by the fire. She had a box of colored threads on the table at her side and black wool partially embroidered spread across her lap. She coughed violently into a cloth, folded and tucked it in her apron pocket before taking up her sewing again. Anyone could see by her pallor and the dark circles under her eyes that Mama wasn’t well again. Mama had weak lungs. Tonight, her lips had a faint bluish tint. “Help your sister, Marta. She’s developing another headache.”

Elise had spent all evening on her sampler, brow furrowed over every stitch in pained concentration. Marta had helped her until Papa returned. About the only thing Elise could do well was hem, leaving Mama and Marta to do the fine embroidery work. Elise struggled as much as Hermann in school, though not for the same reasons. At ten, Elise could barely read and write. However, what she lacked in intellect and dexterity was overlooked because of her rare and delicate beauty. Mama’s greatest pleasure took place every morning when she brushed and braided Elise’s waist-length white-blond hair. She had flawless alabaster skin and wide, angelic blue eyes. Papa asked nothing of her, taking pride in her beauty, acting sometimes as though he owned a priceless piece of art.

Marta worried about her sister. Papa might be right about suitors, but he didn’t understand Elise’s deep-seated fears. She had an almost-desperate dependence upon Mama and became hysterical when Papa went into one of his rages, though never in Elise’s life had a hand been laid on her in anger. Papa would have an eye out for a settled man with money and position for Elise.

Marta prayed nightly that God would bless her sister with a husband who would cherish and protect her—and be rich enough to hire others to cook, clean, and raise the children! Elise would never be able to carry out such responsibilities.

Marta lifted a stool and set it beside her mother's chair. "Frau Keller always wants things done yesterday."

"She's a good customer." Mama laid a section of skirt carefully over Marta's lap so they could work on it together.

"*Good* is not a word I would use, Mama. The woman is a tyrant."

"It's not wrong to know what you want."

"If you're willing to pay for it." Marta fumed. Yes, Papa would ask Frau Keller to pay for the additional work, but Frau Keller would refuse. If Papa pressed, Frau Keller would become indignant "at such treatment" and threaten to take her business "to someone more appreciative of my generosity." She would remind Papa that she ordered six dresses a year, and he should be thankful for her business in these hard times. Papa would apologize profusely, then add what he could to the amount Herr Keller owed for the suits Papa made him. And Papa often had to wait six months for even partial payment. No wonder the Kellers were rich. They clung to their money like lichen to rock. "If I were Papa, I'd demand a portion of the money before beginning the work, and full payment before any garment left the shop."

Mama laughed softly. "So much fire from a twelve-year-old girl."

Marta wondered how Mama would ever finish the skirt on time. She threaded a needle with pink silk and set to work on flower petals. "Papa has hired me out, Mama."

Mama sighed. "I know, *Liebling*." She quickly drew the cloth from her apron pocket to cover her mouth. When the spasm passed, she fought for breath as she pushed the cloth back into its hiding place.

"Your cough is getting worse."

"I know. It comes from the years I worked in the cigar factory. It'll get better when summer comes." In summer, Mama could sit outside and work instead of sitting by a smoking fire.

“It never goes away completely, Mama. You should see the doctor.” Perhaps when Marta worked for Frau Zimmer, she might speak with the doctor about what could be done to help Mama.

“Let’s not worry about that now. Frau Keller must have her dress!”



Marta quickly became used to her work schedule. She got up while it was still dark, dressed quickly, and went up the street to the bakery. When Frau Becker let her in the front door, the room smelled of fresh baking bread. Marta went into the kitchen and chopped nuts for *Nusstorten* while Frau Becker stirred batter for *Schokoladenkuchen*.

“We’re making *Magenbrot* today,” Herr Becker announced as he stretched out a long snake of dough and cut it into small pieces. “Marta, dip those in butter and roll them in cinnamon and raisins, and then arrange them in the angel cake tins.”

Marta worked quickly, aware that both of the Beckers watched her. Frau Becker poured the dark batter into cake forms and handed the wooden spoon to Marta. “Go ahead. Lick it clean.”

Herr Becker laughed. “Ah, see how the girl can smile, Fanny.” He punched dough down. “You learn quickly, Marta.” He winked at his wife. “We’ll have to teach her how to make Epiphany cakes this coming Christmas. *Ja?*”

“And *Lebkuchen*.” Frau Becker winked at Marta. Mama loved the spicy gingerbread. “And *Marzipan*.” Frau Becker took the spoon and tossed it into the sink. “I’ll teach you how to make *Butterplätzchen*.” She set butter, flour, and sugar on the worktable. “And tomorrow, I’ll teach you how to make anise cookies.”

When the bakery opened for business, Frau Becker gave Marta two breakfast loaves as payment. “You’re a good worker.”

Marta took the bread to Mama and had a bowl of *Müsli*. After doing her chores and eating an early lunch, she headed down the road past the schoolhouses to the doctor’s house.

Frau Zimmer looked distressed when she opened the door.

“Here! Take him!” She thrust her screaming baby into Marta’s arms and grabbed her shawl. “I’m going to visit a friend.” She slipped around Marta and headed off without a backward glance.

Marta went inside and closed the door so people wouldn’t hear the baby wailing. She paced, singing hymns. When that didn’t calm little Evrard, she tried rocking him. She checked his diaper. Finally, exasperated, she put him down on the rug. “Go ahead and scream your head off.”

The baby stopped crying and rolled onto his stomach. Arching his back, he reached his arms out and kicked his feet. Marta laughed. “You just wanted a little freedom, didn’t you?” She collected scattered toys and dropped them in front of him. He kicked his legs harder, gurgling in delight. He squealed, his hands opening and closing. “Reach for it! I’m not giving it to you.” He managed to scoot a few inches and grasp a rattle. Marta clapped. “Good for you, Evrard!” He rolled onto his back.

When little Evrard wore himself out, Marta picked him up and rocked him to sleep. Frau Zimmer came in an hour later, looking refreshed. She stopped and listened, looking somewhat alarmed. “Is he all right?” She hurried over to the crib and peered in. “He’s sleeping! He never sleeps in the afternoon. What did you do?”

“I let him play on the rug. He tried to crawl.”

The following afternoon, Marta went up the hill to *Hotel Edelweiss*, where Frau Gilgan put her to work stripping beds and remaking them with fresh mattress sheets and duvets for the feather beds. Fluffing them full of air, she rolled them on the end of the bed, then took the laundry downstairs to the wash room. Frau Gilgan worked with her, sharing amusing stories of past guests. “Of course, you have some who are not pleased with anything you do and others who break their legs skiing.”

Two of Rosie’s older sisters manned the washtubs and kept great pots of water boiling on the woodstove. Marta’s arms ached from stirring linen; pushing sheets and duvets down, around, and over; spreading folds; and stirring again. Kristen, the older girl, hooked a sheet and dragged it up, folding and wringing it into tight ropes,

letting the water cascade back into the washtub. Then she shook the sheet out into a tub of steaming rinse water.

Snowflakes caught on the window frames, but perspiration dripped from Marta's face. She blotted it away with her sleeve.

"Oh!" Frau Gilgan came over and held out her hands, strong and square, reddened and callused from years of washing. "Let me see your hands, Marta." Frau Gilgan turned Marta's hands palms up and clucked her tongue. "Blisters. I should not have worked you so hard on your first day, but you didn't complain. Your hands will be so sore you won't be able to make a stitch."

"But there's a whole pile of sheets yet to do."

Frau Gilgan put her fists on her ample hips and laughed. "*Ja*, and that's why I have daughters." She put her arm around Marta. "Go on upstairs. Rosie will be back from school by now. She'll want to have tea with you before you leave. And if you've time, she needs help with geography."

Marta said she'd be delighted.

Rosie jumped from her chair. "Marta! I forgot you started work today. I'm so glad you're here! I missed you at school. It's not the same without you. No one to answer Herr Scholz's difficult questions."

"Your mother says you need help with your geography."

"Oh, not now. I've so much to tell you. Let's go for a walk."

Marta knew she'd have to listen to the latest escapades of Arik Brechtwald. Rosie had been in love with him since the day he fished her out of a creek. It did no good to remind her Arik had caused the fall in the first place. He'd dared her to cross the Zulg. She'd made it halfway across when she slipped on a rock and slithered down over a small waterfall before Arik could catch hold of her. He'd lifted her out and carried her to the bank. Ever since then, Arik had been Rosie's knight in shining armor.

Snow sifted softly from the clouds overhead, adding thickness to the blanket of white over Steffisburg. Smoke curled up like ghostly fingers from chimneys, dissipating in the chill afternoon air. While Rosie chattered on gaily, Marta trudged along beside her. White

drifts covered the Alpine meadow, which would in a few months turn verdant green with splashes of red, yellow, and blue blossoms tempting and nourishing Frau Fuchs's bees. Rosie brushed snow off a log and sat where they could look down on *Hotel Edelweiss* and Steffisburg below. If the day had been clear, they could have seen *Schloss Thun* and the *Thunersee* like a sheet of gray glass.

Today, low clouds made the sun look like a white, blurred ball ready to bounce off the mountains beyond Interlaken.

Marta's breath made steam. Tears welled up as she listened to Rosie's musings about Arik. Her friend didn't have a care in the world other than whether Arik liked her or not. Pressing her mouth tight, Marta tried not to feel jealous. Maybe Papa was right. She and Rosie would be friends for a little while longer, and then their different situations would build a wall between them. Marta worked for the Gilgans now. She wasn't the friend who came to call or have tea or sit and chat while Rosie's mother put out anise cookies on a silver platter and hot chocolate in fine porcelain cups. Everything was about to change, and Marta couldn't bear it.

Now that Papa had removed her from school, she would only be qualified to be a servant or tend someone's fractious baby. She could help Mama with dressmaking, but Mama made so little money when one considered how many hours she worked for women like Frau Keller, who expected perfection for a pittance. And Mama never saw a franc of what she made. Papa held the purse strings and complained bitterly about how little they had, though he always managed to find enough for beer.

Rosie put her arm around Marta's shoulders. "Don't look so sad."

Marta stood abruptly and moved away. "Herr Scholz was going to teach me French. I could've continued with Latin. If I knew even one more language, I might be able to find a decent job someday in a nice shop in Interlaken. If my father has his way, I'll never be more than a servant." As soon as the bitter words poured out, shame filled her. How could she say such things to Rosie? "I'm not ungrateful to your parents. Your mother was so kind to me today. . . ."

“They love you like a daughter.”

“Because you’ve loved me like a sister.”

“That’s not going to change just because you’re not in school. I wish I could quit. I’d rather stay home and help my mother than try to cram facts into my head.”

“Oh, Rosie.” Marta covered her face. “I would’ve given anything to stay, through high school at least.”

“I could give you books.”

“I’ve no time now. Papa’s seen to that.” Marta stared off at the cloud-shrouded mountains that stood like prison walls. Her father intended to keep her captive. She was stronger and healthier than Mama. She could learn faster than Hermann or Elise. Hermann would go off to university. Elise would marry. Marta would be kept at home. After all, someone would have to do the work when Mama couldn’t.

“I have to go home. I need to help Mama.”

As they walked down the hill, Rosie took Marta’s hand. “Maybe when Hermann makes it into high school, your father will allow you to come back to school.”

“Hermann will fail again. He has no head for books.” At least, the next time, Papa would not be able to blame her.



A Note from the Author

Dear Reader,

Since I became a Christian, my stories have begun with struggles I'm having in my own faith walk, or issues that I haven't worked out. That's how this two-book series started. I wanted to explore what caused the rift between my grandma and my mom during the last years of my grandmother's life. Was it a simple misunderstanding that they never had time to work out? or something deeper that had grown over the years?

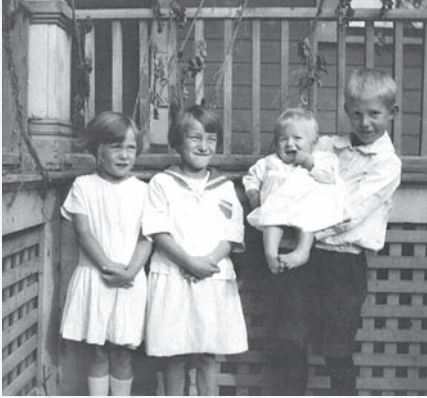
Many of the events of this story were inspired by family history that I researched and events I read about in my mother's journals or experienced in my own life. For instance, when I was three, my mother had tuberculosis, just like Hildie did. Dad brought her home from the

sanatorium and Grandma Wulff came to live with us and help out. It was difficult for everyone. A child doesn't understand communicable disease. For a long time, I didn't think my mother loved me. She never held or kissed me. She kept her distance to protect her children, but it took years before I understood what felt like rejection was actually evidence of sacrificial love.



Steffisburg, Switzerland

While thinking over the past, my husband, Rick, and I decided to take a trip to Switzerland, my grandmother's homeland. Several years earlier, we had gone on a heritage trip to Sweden to meet many of Rick's relatives on his mother's side. I knew I wouldn't have the same opportunity in Switzerland, but wanted to see the countryside with which my grandmother would have been familiar. We visited Bern, where my grandmother went to housekeeping school, and Interlaken, where she worked in a hotel restaurant. When I mentioned to the tour guide that my grandmother had come from the small town of Steffisburg near Thun, she and the bus driver decided to surprise us. Taking an alternate route, they drove into Steffisburg and parked across the street from the centuries-old Lutheran church my grandmother's family must have attended. Rick and I stood in front of the



The Wulff siblings

Steffisburg map for a picture before wandering the church grounds and sitting in the sanctuary. We walked up and down the main street, taking lots of pictures. It was a very precious moment for me. On the way out of town, we caught a glimpse of Thun Castle, another place my grandmother mentioned.

Going through family pictures, I came across several of my mom and her siblings. The one above is my favorite. Mom is second from the left, giggling. Sig was the eldest, then came Mom, Margaret, and Elsie. The picture was taken on the farm in the Central Valley where Grandma and Grandpa had almond trees and grapevines. They dried grapes to make raisins. When my brother and I were young, we often spent a few weeks every summer on the farm, romping and playing and swimming in the irrigation ditches that ran along the back side of the property.

Mom went away to Fresno for nurses' training, then worked at Alta Bates Hospital in Berkeley. My father worked part-time as an orderly. He told me with some amusement that he would go to Mom's ward and ask for an aspirin. Nurses were not to date orderlies, but Dad eventually won Mom over. Not long after they were married,



Francine's parents, the Kings



King family vacation; “Marta” on right

he was called off to war and served as a medic in the European theater. He was in the third wave into Normandy and fought in Germany during the final days of World War II.

My parents enjoyed camping and wanted my brother and me to see as much of our country as possible. Every year, they saved vacation time and took us off on a trip to visit as many national parks as they could squeeze into two weeks. They often invited Grandma Wulff to come along. When my brother and I would doze in the backseat, Grandma or Mom would prod us. “Wake up, sleepyhead. Look out the window! You may never see this part of the country again.” Every few years, we made the trip from Pleasanton, California, back to Colorado Springs, my father’s hometown, to visit Grandma and Grandpa King. The photo above is one of the rare pictures of my family with both of my grandmothers. Unfortunately, Grandma King died when I was six.

I am blessed to have many wonderful family memories, many of which include Grandma Wulff. I knew there were times of stress and tension between my parents and Grandma, but all families have them. Most work through them. Sometimes minor disagreements can escalate when things aren’t resolved.

No one but God can see into the human heart. We can't even fully see into our own. My mother and my grandmother were both strong Christians. They both served others all their lives. Both were admirable women of strong character whom I loved dearly. I still love them and miss them both. I choose to believe my grandmother forgave my mom at the end for whatever hurt lay between them. I choose to believe she simply did not have the time or voice to say it. I know my mother loved her to the end of her own life.

This book has been a three-year quest to feel at peace about the hurt between Mom and Grandma, the possible causes, the ways they might have misunderstood one another, how they might have been reconciled. Jesus teaches us to love one another, but sometimes love doesn't come packed the way we want. Sometimes fear has to be set aside so we can share the past hurts that have shaped our lives, so we can dwell in freedom with one another. And sometimes we don't recognize love when it is offered.

Someday when I pass from this life to the next, I hope Mom and Grandma will both be standing with Jesus and welcoming me home—just as I will be waiting when my own beloved daughter arrives—and her daughter after her and all the generations yet to come.

Francine Rivers

Discussion Guide

1. Marta certainly had a difficult childhood. What factors shaped her the most, for better or worse? How do those influences shape the woman she becomes?
2. How does Marta's relationship with her father shape her early beliefs about God and His expectations? How is it different from the way Mama sees God? What seems to make the biggest impression on the way Marta views God? Does that change throughout the story? If so, what causes that change?
3. At the end of chapter 4, Marta's mother gave her a blessing when she left home to make her way in the world. In what ways, verbal or otherwise, did your parents give you their blessing? If they didn't, what do you wish they had said to you? In what ways did you—or do you hope to someday—do the same for your own children?
4. It has been said that women often marry a version of their father. How is Niclas like and unlike Marta's father? In what

ways is Niclas both passive and aggressive? Marta sometimes seems to harbor resentment toward Niclas. Is that fair?

5. Marta has a hard time trusting Niclas because of the way her father treated her mother. How do you think that makes Niclas feel? In what ways—good or bad—has your family of origin affected your marriage or close friendships?
6. Niclas asks Marta to sell the boardinghouse she bought as the fulfillment of a lifelong dream. Is that an appropriate request? What do you think of the way Niclas makes the decision and communicates it to Marta? If you were Marta, what would you have done in that situation? Have you faced a similar decision in your marriage or family?
7. Marta sometimes makes it difficult for Niclas to be the head of their household. Does Marta view herself as a helpmate to Niclas? Do you think he sees her in that way? How is he able to love Marta despite her sometimes-prickly nature?
8. Why does Marta never tell Niclas—or anyone else in her family—that she loves them? How does Marta best show and receive love?
9. In many ways, Marta is like the woman described in Proverbs 31. Which of the qualities described in that passage do you see in her? Which ones is she missing?
10. After rescuing Elise from the Meyers in chapter 5, Marta tells her friend, “I swear before God, Rosie, if I’m ever fortunate enough to have a daughter, I’ll make sure she’s strong enough to stand up for herself!” How do Marta’s family dynamics come into play later in life when she has children of her own?
11. Marta loves Hildemara deeply. Yet of all her children, Hildemara probably feels the least loved. Why is that? Is treating children *differently* the same as *favoring* one over another? What challenges make it difficult to raise all the kids in a family exactly the same? How hard should parents strive to do so?

12. Have you ever felt, as Hildemara did, that others in your family have unfairly received a greater share of love, financial provision, or some other valuable resource? How did you respond? What advice would you give someone in this situation?
13. After Hildemara's incident with her teacher Mrs. Ransom, Hildemara tells her father that she prayed and prayed, but her prayers didn't change the situation. Niclas replies, "Prayers changed you, Hildemara." What does he mean by that? Have you ever had a similar experience?
14. Why is Marta so averse to Hildemara's decision to attend nursing school? Does she ever change her mind about Hildemara's chosen profession?
15. For several months, Hildemara keeps Trip at arm's length. Why do you think she does that? What makes her finally admit her love for him?
16. Trip, like many men of his generation, has tragic, life-altering experiences in World War II. Have you heard stories from or about men in your own family who were similarly affected? Have any of your loved ones been involved in more recent wars? How has war affected your family?
17. Tuberculosis is much rarer today than it was in Marta's and Hildemara's lifetimes. Yet life-threatening and chronic illnesses have never been more prevalent. How has your family been impacted by serious illness? Discuss the strain illness can place on family dynamics, regardless of the "relational health" a family may have at the outset.
18. If you could change one thing about the way you were parented, what would it be? And if you have children, is there anything you wish you could change about the way you've parented them? What is one step you could take in that direction?

19. At the end of this book Marta is determined, with God's help, to make a fresh start with Hildemara. Do you think she will succeed? Why or why not? How do you think Hildemara will respond? Is there hope for this relationship?
20. If you could sit down with Marta and Hildemara, what would you like to tell each of them? Is there someone in your family you need to talk with about mistakes or misperceptions from the past that are still affecting you today? If you have unresolved issues with a loved one who has passed away, who might you talk with to try to reach some closure for yourself?

About the Author

FRANCINE RIVERS BEGAN her literary career at the University of Nevada, Reno, where she graduated with a bachelor of arts degree in English and journalism. From 1976 to 1985, she had a successful writing career in the general market, and her books were highly acclaimed by readers and reviewers. Although raised in a religious home, Francine did not truly encounter Christ until later in life, when she was already a wife, a mother of three, and an established romance novelist.

Shortly after becoming a born-again Christian in 1986, Francine wrote *Redeeming Love* as her statement of faith. First published by Bantam Books, and then rereleased by Multnomah Publishers in the mid-1990s, this retelling of the biblical story of Gomer and Hosea, set during the time of the California Gold Rush, is now considered by many to be a classic work of Christian fiction. *Redeeming Love* continues to be one of the Christian Booksellers Association's top-selling titles, and it has held a spot on the Christian best-seller list for nearly a decade.

Since *Redeeming Love*, Francine has published numerous novels

with Christian themes—all best sellers—and she has continued to win both industry acclaim and reader loyalty around the globe. Her Christian novels have been awarded or nominated for numerous honors, including the RITA Award, the Christy Award, the ECPA Gold Medallion, and the Holt Medallion in Honor of Outstanding Literary Talent. In 1997, after winning her third RITA Award for inspirational fiction, Francine was inducted into the Romance Writers of America's Hall of Fame. Francine's novels have been translated into more than twenty different languages, and she enjoys best-seller status in many foreign countries, including Germany, the Netherlands, and South Africa.

Francine and her husband, Rick, live in northern California and enjoy time spent with their three grown children and taking every opportunity to spoil their grandchildren. Francine uses her writing to draw closer to the Lord, and she desires that through her work she might worship and praise Jesus for all He has done and is doing in her life.

Visit her Web site at www.francinerivers.com.