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From the Editor

Happy Friday everyone! As writers, trying to make the most of our time, aren't we happy when we can use our words for a dual purpose, saving us time so we can write even more words? I know I am. And so here we are, doing just that. Especially in this season of life where so many personal difficulties are impacting my time and energy.

I always enjoy participating in the A-to-Z Blog Challenge that takes place in April. For most of the last eight (??) years, I've joined thousands of other writers in this annual challenge. As I've looked at my schedule and tried to assess what I need to continue with and what I can remove from my plate, the A-to-Z challenge almost ended up scratched from the list of future projects. But then I thought, as I go -through my research for a book due out Christmas 2021, I can use this dual-purpose method to my advantage.

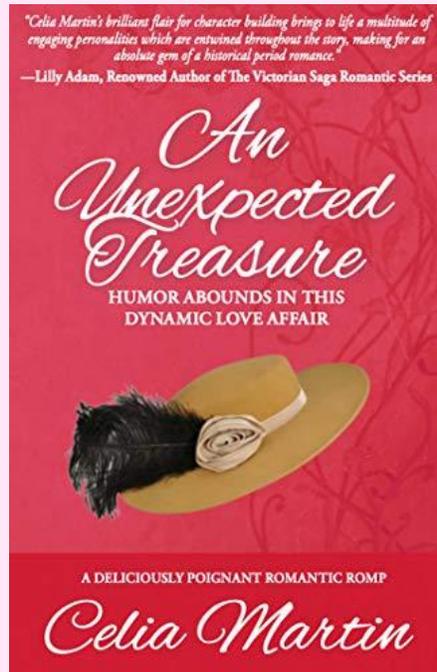
So, for the next 26 weeks, give or take a few for exceptions, like weeks when we run our 2nd birthday short story contest, and a few other weeks where other posts are planned, the articles I'll bring you are what I'm working on for the A-to-Z Challenge. By April I should have the 26 articles/posts written and I can participate with a minimum of work during a month that has a lot of personal commitments in it.

The A-to-Z articles I'll be sharing with you are gleaned from my research for ***The POW's Christmas Legacy***. It's a wartime story, yet one of a different sort. It's one that left a legacy in this small northern Iowa town that continues to this day. Join us each week to learn more about the nativity scene crafted by German POW's in Iowa during World War 2

Stay tuned for future issues –In the weeks ahead we have author interviews scheduled with EJ Barnes, Marina Osipova, Renata Stankova, Tom Palmer, Malve von Hassell, Peter Turnham, Carmen Radtke, Florence Kraut, and more!

Trisha

New Release



Unexpected Treasure

Celia Martin

Lady Rotherby is determined she will train Lady Selena to be the lady that Selena's mother so desperately wants her to be, so Selena will find happiness and love with a man of her social standing. Because Selena loves her mother, she has promised she will do her best to become that lady of quality. But that was before she met Calder Grantham, neighboring yeoman, and the most handsome man Selena has ever encountered. After a few short meetings with Calder, Selena determines she will marry him and be a farmer's wife. That lifestyle suits her much better than the lifestyle her mother wants for her. She could care less which earl is seated next to which baron at the dinner table. Several obstacles stand in her way to the happy ending she is anticipating. She must win Calder's love. And she must convince her parents that her station in life should not prevent her from marrying the man she has given her heart.

A Chance Conversation with a Friend



About two years ago, I'd started a short story featuring a vintage 1920s black and white postcard I'd picked up in an antique store. The picture featured 'The Grotto' in Iowa. I researched the Grotto in West Bend, started by Father Dobberstein, who laid the first stone in 1912. Wanting some additional historical tidbits to throw into the story, I discovered some information about a nativity scene in Algona that had been built by German prisoners held there at a POW camp during World War 2.

A POW camp on American soil? German soldiers held here? A nativity scene built by prisoners? One that is still displayed 75 years later? I thought that tidbit was so fascinating, I had to include it one of the scenes. But then, in true Gemini fashion, after adding short snippets to the story every week, after a few months I tired of it and moved on to another tale.

Fast forward a year or so and I was having lunch with a friend here in Texas. During lunch she mentioned a trip to Iowa, where she was born and raised. I forget if she'd just come back, or if she was planning to go. I brought up a set of 1934 quilt squares that I'd donated to a museum in southern Iowa and wondered if she would be close to that area.

No, she replied, she was from northern Iowa and mentioned that she was raised in Wesley. "Isn't that around West Bend?" I asked. "I'd researched some of that area for a short story I was writing about the Grotto at the Catholic Church there."

"The Grotto! I've been there many times growing up. My father's family lived in West Bend, so when we visited, we often stopped at the Grotto."

How excited I was. To have a friend that had actually been at a location I'd researched. As we talked more about Iowa, chatting and sharing memories, I added that there was also a nativity scene near there, created by German prisoners and still displayed every Christmas.

"Yes! In Algona. I've seen it. When I was younger. We had some of the POW jackets. After the camp was disbanded after the war ended, they sold everything off. My dad bought some of the POW jackets. I wore one when I had to go out and do chores during the winter. They were the *warmest* jackets."

Once I calmed down enough to participate in the conversation, instead of excitedly babbling incoherently, she continued. "In fact, they made a booklet on the 50th anniversary and collected stories from many of the local people. My Aunt Frances has a story in there. Would you like to borrow it?"

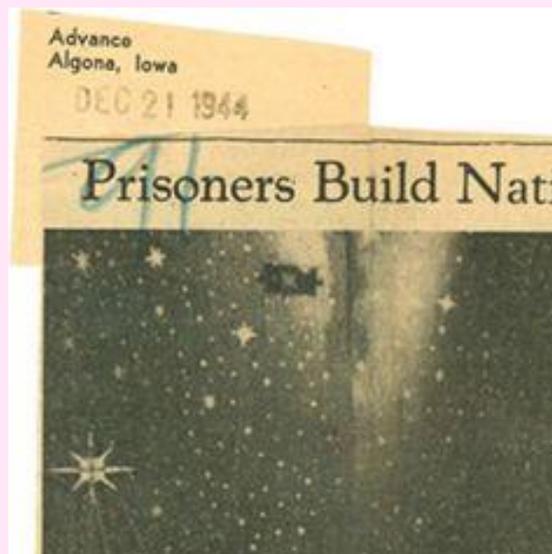
Would I like to borrow it? That was the daftest question I've ever heard. Silly Rebecca!

The next time we got together, she brought the booklet with her. I took it home and was so entranced with the stories in it, I went and had all the pages copied.

Then, it went on my bookshelf and I continued on with other books and stories and writing projects that had nothing to do with Iowa.

Until another year passed. I sat at home, racking my brain trying to think of what Christmas story I wanted to write for 2021. And the booklet with all the memories, and Aunt Frances' story floated to the surface and I immediately knew what my Christmas book would be this year.

What are the odds that one of my Texas friends would be connected to a fact I'd researched years earlier, without even knowing at the time that she'd come from Iowa? Serendipity. I love it when I see it happen in my life!



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Author Spotlight: Sherry Burton



Hello Sherry Burton! We're excited to chat with you today about your writing. I see that your Orphan Train Sagas now has four books, with the fifth coming in 2021. According to your web site, 18 books are planned. What inspired you to write this series?

Thank you for having me. First, let me give you a bit of the history surrounding the saga.

In the mid-1850s, there were over 30k children living on the streets of New York City. Children as young as four and five who had to lie, cheat, and steal just to survive. Some of the children were true orphans. Others were not. Either way, their situation was dire, and something had to be done. So, between 1854 and 1929, over 250k children from New York and Boston were sent west on what was later referred to as 'the orphan trains' to find new homes. Children most people haven't heard about.

When I first overheard a discussion regarding the Orphan Trains twenty-plus years ago, I had never even published my first book, and yet I knew that I would someday write a story about an orphan train rider. At the time, I was dabbling with what would eventually be my first romance novel and assumed that romance would be the heart of the storyline. I jotted a few notes and moved on, writing and publishing mostly romance books.

Then, one day in 2017, while visiting a train museum in Green Bay, Wisconsin, something wonderful happened. The voices showed up, filling my head with ideas and telling me that now was the time. I began researching everything I could find on the orphan trains. It took nearly eighteen years from the moment I first heard about the orphan trains until I moved forward with the project. A good thing as the single book idea morphed into the planned eighteen book historical fiction saga. Not only did the idea morph, but I also found myself as well. Since writing *Discovery*, the first in *The Orphan Train Saga*, I've also transitioned, preferring to write historical fiction over anything else. While I find writing regular fiction easier, I love the challenge that comes with writing and researching historical fiction. I genuinely enjoy incorporating history to tell the child's story.

Can you tell us a little bit about the series and how the characters of each book end up interacting with one another?

I introduce seventeen of the eighteen children in book one. *Discovery* tells Miletta's story, and each book after that will tell one of the children's tale. The reader will follow each child from their earliest memory and find out what caused them to be without a home. The reader will journey with the children on the train and follow as they grow.

Discovery begins in current day with Cindy going through her grandmother's belongings. Cindy's grandmother always held her at a distance, so Cindy's mission is to clean out the storage unit and move on. Cindy finds not only her grandmother's journals but those of other children as well. As Cindy and her mother read the journals, the books switch between current day and the past. My readers have become as invested in Cindy and her mother's story as they have the children within the journals. Many writing to tell me how much they enjoy the story within the story.

All of the children know each other on some level; however, the first six books are so intertwined that you will learn something different about a previous character with each turn of the page. While Cindy and Her mother will continue to be part of the series, book seven will take the journey in a new direction with fresh stories that aren't as intertwined as the previous books.

Do you have any favorite methods you use in researching your books?

Newspapers dot com has a lot of great information. I love pouring through real history to find interesting snippets of the times. I am also in contact with the head researcher at the National Orphan Train Complex, who is eager to help if I have any questions.

Are these books standalone books, or should they be read in the order that they're written?

While there is a definitive end to each book, they should be read in order, as I do not revisit things from previous books.

What challenges have you found with writing historical fiction?

The only thing that I've discovered thus far is historical fiction takes longer to write due to the enormous amount of research involved.

Your latest book Ezra's Story is billed as an Orphan Train Extra #1. What's the difference between the Orphan Train Sagas and the Orphan Train Extras?

I'm so glad you asked this question. The Orphan Train Saga books are meaty books that follow each child from their earliest memory to well into adulthood or longer depending on what the character wishes the reader to know. There is also the ongoing story of Cindy and her mother. The Orphan Train Extras are just that, extra stories from side characters in the books. Characters so endearing you want to know more about but who don't warrant a place within the saga. The extras are shorter books that can be read independently or in conjunction with the saga for a richer reading experience.

Tell us a little about your writing routine and your workspace. What is essential for you?

I have a dedicated office in the center of our home. My husband built customized bookcases, along with a catwalk for the fur babies, who prefer to hang out with me while I write. I have a huge L-shaped desk with dual computer screens- my writing theater, one screen for writing, the other research. I prefer to work in silence, as it seems to appease the voices in my head. I always begin each writing project with a clean desk. By the end of the novel, the desk is a chaotic mess of scribbled notes, research books, and cats, always cats.

Is there anything you'd like to share with us that I didn't ask you about?

When I began writing TOTS, I thought I was writing stories for adults. But then I started receiving e-mails from children as young as nine telling me they'd found my books and were greatly enjoying them. I've had descendants of orphan train riders write to say they read my books with their children to share the history of their ancestors. It is incredibly humbling to know that my books are enjoyed by such a vast age range of readers.

Discovery (the first in The Orphan Train Saga) has been endorsed by the National Orphan Train Complex. It was a finalist in the Book Excellence Awards, and I'm thrilled to announce I just received word that Discovery has now earned The Coffee Pot Book Club Award (5 stars)



You can find Sherry A. Burton's books here:

DISCOVERY (BOOK 1): <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07KK42KZ1>

FOUR BOOK SERIES:

https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07SVFW9S4?ref=dbs_p_mng_rwt_ser_shvlr&storeType=ebooks

EZRA'S STORY: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08Q5XB4XB>

You can find Sherry Burton here:

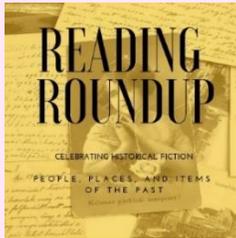
FACEBOOK: <https://www.sherryaburton.com>

FACEBOOK AUTHOR PAGE: <https://www.facebook.com/SherryABurtonauthor>

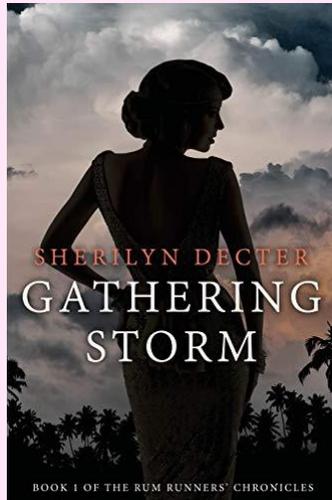
INSTAGRAM: <https://www.instagram.com/authorssherryaburton>

BIO: Born in Kentucky, Sherry and her Retired Navy Veteran husband live in Michigan's thumb. When not in the writing chair, Sherry travels the country doing book signings and giving lectures on the orphan trains.

Sherry A. Burton is the author of The Orphan Train Saga novels, a planned eighteen book historical fiction saga that revolves around the Orphan Trains. Books in the saga include Discovery, Shameless, Treachery, and Guardian. Loyal -the fifth book in the saga- is expected to be released late summer of 2021.



The 1930s



Gathering Storm

Sherilyn Decter

She left criminal life behind. Will her new business venture send her to sleep with the fishes? Florida Coast, 1932. Edith Duffy might be grieving her gangster husband's death, but she's no damsel in distress. Leaving the sordid world of Philadelphia bootlegging, she settles in a small town outside Miami and buys a speakeasy. But when she launches a lucrative rum-running operation, indignant locals conspire to destroy her.

Edith lands squarely back in gangland culture, with a Bible-thumping preacher campaigning to shut her down and smugglers resentful of her skill. And now she must forge alliances and make unlikely allies just to survive. Luckily, her mentor is none other than the wife of the notorious Al Capone...

Will Edith's fondness for underworld profits lead her to a dead end?

Gathering Storm is the first book in the Rum Runners' Chronicles, a fast-paced historical women's fiction trilogy. If you like atmospheric settings, mob stories, and independent heroines, then you'll love Sherilyn Decter's Prohibition-era adventure.

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