



Vol. 3, No. 28, AUGUST 2021

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From the Editor

Hello, my historical fiction aficionados. Welcome to August, a hot and heavy summer month for those of us in the US, and a cold winter month for others of you. In this issue we're chatting with author Malve von Hassell about her new release, *The Amber Crane* - and discussing much more than that. She shares a lot of interesting writing advice and insight. Keep reading to find out more!

Back in February, I shared about how a chance conversation with a friend led to some fascinating research information that I never would have known existed if we hadn't have happened on the odd conversation that we had. That common link between us led to the book I'm currently working on, *The POW's Legacy*.

When I approached my cover designer with the challenge of creating a cover, she was more than up for it. I said it's a Christmas story. But it's not a Christmas story. It's a WW2 story. Yet it's more than a WW2 story. It's a story about community, about people coming together, about friendships formed between people of warring countries. It's about a beautiful legacy left by the German prisoners held captive on our soil – a legacy that continues to share hope with people over 75 years later. I sent a picture of the nativity scene created by the German POWs in the Algona, Iowa POW camp, but said I knew we couldn't use it, because of copyright issues. She contacted the POW museum and received permission to use it!

This month, I'm resharing the beginnings of this story and how it all came about with you, in case you missed it when that article ran in February. And I'm sharing the delightful cover with you.

Stay tuned—in the next few issues, we'll be chatting with Alec Schulz, Mary Armstrong, Carolyn E. Cook, and Roxi Harms!

Trisha

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New Release



[Wild Blue Yonder](#)

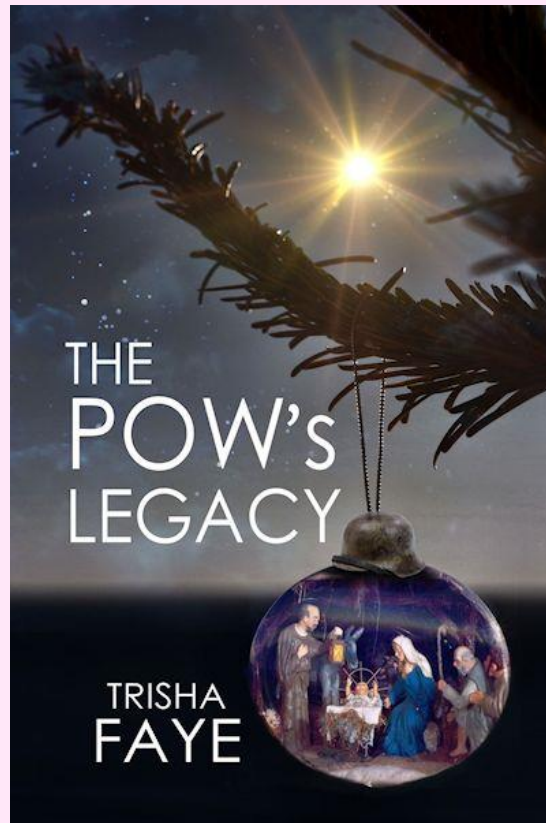
WM Arnold

Air Transport Auxiliary pilot Doris Winter is accused of stealing a valuable item from a famous Hollywood movie star, now a captain in the US Army Air Corps, after a dance at the air base in England where he's stationed. Gathering her close friends together, she's determined to clear her name.

Ruth's POW son suffers a life-changing injury just as her own cottage takes damage in an air raid and Penny's estranged little sister unexpectedly turns up, having run away from school. Together with the ongoing thefts of items of clothing and surprise personal revelations, these all threaten to hamper their investigation.

In spite of the worsening war situation, they must band together to rise above their troubles and prove love and friendship is worth fighting for.

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 later. 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: Malve von Hassell



Hello Malve von Hassell! Welcome to Pages of the Past. We've been excited about being able to chat with you about your newest book, and your writing journey. Tell us about your latest book, *The Amber Crane*.

I grew up on legends and stories about amber, the famous gold of the Baltic Sea. Lying awake at night, I dreamed of the feared beach patrol galloping along the shore, looking for illegal amber gatherers. The setting for my book is Pomerania, near Gdansk in Poland, where my mother was born. Drawing on an element of fantasy, I create a link between the last years of the Thirty Years War with the last years of World War II, both experienced through the eyes of an apprentice in the amber guild in a small seaside town in Pomerania. Several characters in *The Amber Crane* are composites of relatives who shared their stories with me, in particular, the descriptions of the evacuation of Pomerania during the spring of 1945. The experience of

losing one's place in a land where one's ancestors have lived since the 13th century left scars not only in the psyche of those immediately affected but also in that of their descendants. We live in a world where so many people find themselves cut off from their own history. Such stories deserve to be told. Many people who lived through World War II retreated into silence about some of their experiences. This silence itself became an inspiration for writing the book and for trying to convey some of this history of the tortured lands of my forebears and the resilience of people who have lived in those years to young readers.

What drew you to write about the subject matter/genre for your book? Were there any authors that inspired you to writing this subject matter/genre?

I have always loved historical fiction for bringing alive the past as much as for showing possibilities for the present. One of my favorite authors in this genre is Gillian Bradshaw who combines superb historical research with appealing storytelling and memorable characters. I admire Helen Dunmore for her gift for describing a chilling and brutal time in history with words hauntingly beautiful and unforgettable.

How did you use your research in your book?

I want to write fiction that stays as close to the real as is possible. Every detail needs to be checked including the words used or not yet used at a particular time in history. I try to convey as much as possible of the tactile feel—fabrics, foods, scents, and sounds—to bring a particular time in history alive for the reader.

While I have injected an element of fantasy in the form of time travel, in all other respects the story reflects historical realities of the respective times and places.

Are you writing a sequel to this novel?

No. *The Amber Crane* came to the end of its journey, and I am content with that. Meanwhile, I have been working on a biographical account of my mother's life. Some of the stories that inspired *The Amber Crane* also figure in this account. I also have begun with the research for a historical fiction trilogy about Adela of Normandy, a remarkable woman from the 11th century.

How did you end up writing historical fiction?

I started out as an academic writer—if I discount my early attempts at historical fiction (I wrote story about an abbot in a monastery when I was ten) and a lot of young adult angst poetry writing in my twenties when I was desperately trying to emulate T.S. Eliot. Historical fiction grew out of my fascination with certain periods of history that in my opinion are underrepresented in the literature and deserve a retelling.

What is your writing routine and where do you write?

I am happiest when I can establish my own schedule without interruptions, revolving around walking my dog and taking care of domestic matters, before I can settle at the computer. Much of my time is spent on researching and assembling facts and points I want to make. Actual writing usually amounts to three hours at best on a good day.

What do you love and what are the worst parts of writing?

What I love and what I fear and dislike about writing is one and the same. Again and again, every single day I find myself trapped in a vacuum where thoughts and words are elusive, and again and again, I arrive at a way out of the dark tunnel/stumble over a solution to the deadlock/move forward. There is nothing like the exhilaration one feels at such a moment.

How would you describe yourself?

Quiet, stubborn, and solitary. I enjoy people and am infinitely curious about everyone I meet. But I recharge when I am alone. So far my craving for solitude has outweighed the fear of being alone.

What is your life like beyond writing?

I am profoundly grateful for living in an area of New York State, where I am surrounded by woods, swamps, open fields, a bay beach, and the ocean. I walk a lot when I am not working. I love my dog and my garden.

Who are your favorite authors and favorite books?

Ursula LeGuin, *Left Hand of Darkness*, Gillian Bradshaw, *The Sand Reckoner*, Guy Gavriel Kay, *Song for Arbonne*, Helen Dunmore, *The Siege*, J.R.R. Tolkien, *Lord of the Rings*, Dorothy Sayers, *Gaudy Night*, Sue Monk Kidd, *The Secret*, Alison Andersen, *The Summer Guest*, any Jane Austen novel, and shall I go on?

What have you found to be the best way to raise awareness of your books?

I'm a member of SCBW and the Historical Novel Society. I do book blog tours and try to develop my social media profile on Twitter and Facebook. I also have started a blog with a focus on historical fiction. This is exciting. It gives me an opportunity to explore particular historical periods in greater detail than is possible in the context of a work of fiction. It also spurs me to learn more about other authors' work by reviewing their releases.

I've now published three books of historical fiction, two for young adults, and one for the middle grade. I try to promote them all in turn.

I also find that interacting with other authors and learning about their struggles as well as reviewing their books is vital. Such encounters, enriching on a personal level, also often lead to new ideas about book promotion.

What advice do you have for new writers?

Take your time, trust your instincts, and write about something or someone you love. I would recommend having a manuscript read by at least three or four different people, to be open to criticism, and to be willing to take hacksaw to your own writing. And remember to keep your day job. I have found that the most constructive and most encouraging support comes from other writers. Thus, it is helpful to join one or two such author organizations. Attend a few writers' conferences before you start submitting your work. Practice talking to editors and agents by submitting first pages.

Thank you for joining us as this month's featured author, Malve. Can you share some links with us, so our readers can go follow you and check out your books?



You can find Malve von Hassell here:

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/MvonHassell>

Facebook author page: <https://www.facebook.com/malvevonhassellauthor/>

Website: <https://www.malvevonhassell.com>

[Blog: Tales through Time]

<https://www.malvevonhassell.com/blog/>

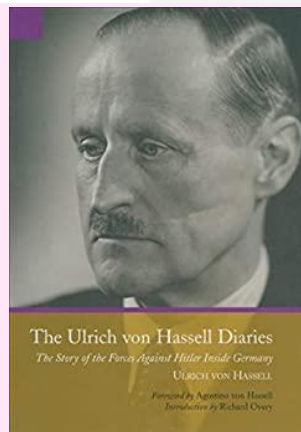
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Amazon author link: <https://www.amazon.com/Malve-von-Hassell/>

Goodreads: https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/471746.Malve_von_Hassell

Malve von Hassell is a freelance writer, researcher, and translator. She holds a Ph.D. in anthropology from the New School for Social Research. Working as an independent scholar, she published *The Struggle for Eden: Community Gardens in New York City* (Bergin & Garvey 2002) and *Homesteading in New York City 1978-1993: The Divided Heart of Loisaida* (Bergin & Garvey 1996). She has also edited her grandfather Ulrich von Hassell's memoirs written in prison in 1944, *Der Kreis schließt sich - Aufzeichnungen aus der Haft 1944* (Propylaen Verlag 1994). She has taught at Queens College, Baruch College, Pace University, and Suffolk County Community College, while continuing her work as a translator and writer. She has self-published two children's picture books, *Letters from the Tooth Fairy* (2012/2020) and *Turtle Crossing* (2021), and her translation and annotation of a German children's classic by Tamara Ramsay, *Rennefarre: Dott's Wonderful Travels and Adventures* (Two Harbors Press, 2012). *The Falconer's Apprentice* (namelos, 2015) was her first historical fiction novel for young adults. She has published *Alina: A Song for the Telling* (BHC Press, 2020), set in Jerusalem in the time of the crusades, and *The Amber Crane* (Odyssey Books, 2021), set in Germany in 1645 and 1945. She has completed a biographical work about a woman coming of age in Nazi Germany and is working on a historical fiction trilogy featuring Adela of Normandy.



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