

The Story behind *The Jeweled Astrolabe* and *Beneath the Cat's Claw*

We apologize that, due to travel schedules, our stories have fallen behind. Here are two stories to get us back on schedule.

The stories in the historical novels *The Jeweled Astrolabe* and *Beneath the Cat's Claw* both convicted and delighted me. I wanted characters who lived out their beliefs in ways that could be juxtaposed to Christian beliefs, but I wasn't prepared for the Islamic characters I found in *The Jeweled Astrolabe*. They were good. With recent and medieval history in view, I had no desire to publish a book that contained good Islamic characters. I was confronted with and convicted by my prejudice. One of the questions I ask in my worldview workshops is how Christians explain the fact that people of every faith and philosophy do good. There are good atheists, good Hindus, good New Agers, and good Muslims. False beliefs do not eliminate a person's ability to do good – to nurture children, to care for their neighbors, and in some cases, even love their enemies. Despite a person's religious beliefs, all people are made in the image of God. While that image was marred by the fall, man's ability to remotely reflect some brilliance of his good Maker remains by God's common grace. In *The Jeweled Astrolabe*, a Jewish and Islamic family are friends and do good to one another. As the publisher, I expected the Islamic character to be the antagonist. Alas, the antagonists are band of rogue Crusaders. When confronted with medieval Christian Europe, the opposite question is brought to bear – do right beliefs assure good actions? The answer is plainly no. Scripture is quite clear that men are judged by both belief and actions. In this story, there are good and bad Christian, Jewish, and Islamic characters who challenge the reader's stereotypes and confront their prejudices. Surprisingly, this was my son's favorite novel, and it promoted some terrific family discussion. Valuable lessons were learned by *all*.

As a history lover, I could not have been more delighted by Jennifer Garrity's story *Beneath the Cat's Claw*. As the content editor of all these novels, my chief focus was their accurate historical treatment and religious content. In researching the novel's setting, I discovered that many details I thought she created as a part of her plot actually sprang out of the pages of history. While my knowledge of the French Revolution was good before this book, it was very good by the time we finished the project! The French Revolution is arguably the most important historical event of the Modern world. We cannot understand the world we live in without knowledge of the ideas that spawned it and the atrocities it birthed. To study the American Revolution without studying the French is to rob our children of perhaps the greatest historical comparison of all times. If you have yet to begin this journey with your children, *Beneath the Cat's Claw* is an outstanding way to introduce the ideas of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. You too will be delighted by subsequent historical study that reveals how much of this story is simply the retelling of the historical narrative. This is my favorite HNET book.

Below are a few words from the author about the inspiration behind the novels. Thanks again, Jenny, for your excellent work in bringing to life the medieval and early modern worlds of the protagonists, Gavriel and Josette.

The Jeweled Astrolabe –

“Living in Europe, I'm privileged to have walked in the footsteps of Gavriel, or, more accurately, to have allowed Gavriel to walk in my footsteps. I live just exactly where Gavriel and his Uncle Reuven cross the Rhine River and enter Germanic territory on their way to make their fortune. Daily I pass remnants of Roman roads and forest tracks that served as highways during the Middle Ages. My surroundings helped me to envision these Jewish traders' journey while writing *The Jeweled Astrolabe*. It was also my pleasure to incorporate the fascinating things I learned, during research about the delicate balance among Jews, Christians and Muslims in Spain during the Middle Ages.”

Beneath the Cat's Claw –

“As I stood in a Paris museum, gazing into a glass case containing the chipped shaving bowl of Maximilian Robespierre, I realized that this infamous man must have had an approachable human side - an everyday life like yours and mine. Weaving what I learned about that life together with what is already well known about his murderous political career produced the backdrop for my novel, *Beneath the Cat's Claw*. Many remnants survive of Josette's Paris; they can be seen in museums and archives and the grand, silent buildings that witnessed the atrocities of the French Revolution.”