

## Sharon Hinck Interview



Sharon Hinck, author of the new book, *Stepping Into Sunlight*, talks about developing characters and how questions of faith serve as central components in her stories. Hinck is the author of several books, including the *Becky Miller series* and the *Sword of Lyric fantasy series*.

**Noble Creative:** Tell us about your new book *Stepping Into Sunlight*?

**Sharon Hinck:** It's about a Navy chaplain's wife, and she witnesses a violent crime right before her husband leaves on his first deployment. They've just moved across the country away from family and friends, because he has become a chaplain. So she is away from the support system she would normally have. She has this traumatic experience that kind of shakes her faith. And her husband that she loves so dearly is gone, and she's worried about his safety.

She has a seven-year-old son and begins to suffer from symptoms of post traumatic stress. She doesn't recognize at first that that is what is going on. When she begins to realize that she is not snapping out of it or getting over it, she is very mad at herself; she is trying to muscle through this and doesn't think she should be letting it affect her. So she doesn't seek help right away. But eventually God begins to bring her help through some unlikely sources. There's a victim support group that she becomes involved in with some wonderful, quirky characters.

**NC:** How did the idea for this book come about?

**Sharon Hinck:** All my stories start with a character that I just begin to explore. I began to have this sense of this really neat character named Penny. I liked her, but she was scared to leave her house, and I thought, *Now why is that?*

Then I realized, *Oh, it's because of this crime that she experienced.* But still most people can get over that. Why is it extra hard for her? *Oh, it's because she has moved across the country.* But why has she moved? *Oh, it's because her husband is in the Navy.*

So little by little she kind of revealed to me what her story was and that's sort of how the stories come to me—starting with the character, and the questions about why they are the way they are.

**NC:** Talk about the Becky Miller series you recently did.

**Sharon Hinck:** Those are my first books to be published: “The Secret Life of Becky Miller” and “Renovating Becky Miller.” They are about a young mom who wants to do big things for God but life keeps getting in the way. And she doesn't realize the way that God is using her very ordinary life.

Every chapter opens with her daydreaming of being Indiana Jones or Mother Teresa or James Bond, and she's saving the world. And then she gets pulled back into her real life, and it's really her contemporary struggles as a wife and mom and a volunteer at her church—and all the things that go wrong. So it's kind of a search-for-meaning story.

And then I have a series: “The Restorer,” “The Restorer's Son” and “The Restorer's Journey.” “The Restorer” was a Christy finalist and “The Restorer's Son” won book of the year at the American Christian Fiction Writers conference last fall. And that one is also about a heroic woman, but it's a fantasy novel. So it's kind of the classic hero's journey, but instead of a young man off on a quest, it's a mom who is pulled into this other world—and fills a heroic role.

**NC:** How did you get started in writing?

**Sharon Hinck:** I actually recently dug out some of my childhood journals and found where I had written, “I dream that one day I might write a novel.” So, it was really fun to find that. But I remember reading a children's book about Nellie Bly in third grade—one of the early women newspaper reporters—who went undercover into hospitals and insane asylums and the women's prisons and then did expose journalism. I remember when I read that story, I thought, *Words are really powerful and people who write can change the world.*

**NC:** As an author, how do you see your faith interacting with your art?

**Sharon Hinck:** It's the heartbeat of everything I write. I'm probably more overt about faith themes than some of my Christian friends who write novels. I think the spiritual journey of life is an epic adventure, so I love focusing on that with my characters. All of my characters do a lot of wrestling with questions of faith.

**NC:** What advice would you give to young or unpublished writers?

**Sharon Hinck:** That's a really good question. I was recently on a book tour and was with a group of other authors, and we were asked that question. Each of us had a different answer. One of the guys said, "Dream; don't stop dreaming." And one of the ladies said, "Read. Read lots of good stuff in a lot of genres." And another one said, "Write. Just write every day."

I said, "Pray." Because I think the odds are so against you as far as being a novelist. But that's OK. If God calls you to do it, He can break those doors open for you. And so seeking His guidance—like what kind of story to write, what to work on next while you wait for doors of publication to open.

Just seeking His leading as an artist, I think, is the most important thing, because then it's about your relationship with Him—so the results aren't as either dangerous to your pride if you succeed or devastating to your heart if you "fail." Because then you're not really failing. You're pursuing your art, you're doing it to serve Him, and the results are up to Him.

So for me that's the most vital thing. And I always tell new writers that I think there's an AA of writing, which has nothing to do with drinking, and that's to be available and to be authentic. And being available means you show up and you do the work, and you are willing to grapple with these things. And take the risk of putting a story on paper and letting others read it.

And then the second A, to be authentic, means you don't write from your place of strength and wisdom and knowing it all. You write from the place of weakness, knowing that we're all needy and we all need Christ, and we're nothing apart from Him. And we're full of questions and struggles and doubts and fears. And I think that's the most generous gift we can give our readers is to write from a place of being authentic.

**NC:** What's the most challenging thing about writing a novel?

**Sharon Hinck:** Every part of it! I was hosting a little writing retreat at my house that I do once a month and one of the people said, "Oh, I just can't wait until it gets easy and the words just flow." And I looked at her, and I said, "Um, that doesn't happen." It's just all hard.

One of my grad school professors used to say that as Christian artists we're always struggling to utter the unutterable. We're trying to convey things that are so beyond us, especially when we write about who God is and how He interacts in our lives and the wonders of who He is, that our words are always going to fall short.

And so then doing the work day after day when you know you're falling short of what you're trying to convey is so tough. So for me it's that daily discouragement and trying to

get over that so that I do the work and give God the chance to use it, even though I see all the flaws in it.

**NC:** Who are some of the writers who have influenced you?

**Sharon Hinck:** So many. My bookshelves have multiple personality disorder. I've got Jack London and Mark Twain and the Brontë sisters and Jane Austen next to my Nancy Drew's and my Grace Livingston Hill's and my Star Trek novels. Of course C. S. Lewis, as far as fiction, his sci-fi trilogy "Out of the Silent Planet," "Perelandra," "That Hideous Strength." People aren't as familiar with that as they are with the Narnia books and stuff. But those impacted my life.

Steven Lawhead and Tolkien, as far as some of the fantasy authors that I love, because I write in that genre, as well.

Then, a lot of nonfiction authors influenced me and a lot of biographies—just how they lived for Christ. Corrie ten Boom and David Wilkerson and Joni Eareckson Tada and writers like that. Philip Yancey, John Eldredge, Francis Schaeffer.

I think for fiction, Francine Rivers is definitely an influence. I really admire what she's done across genres. Jan Karon. I loved the way she gave us a view into a character who didn't see how God was using him, but he kept serving faithfully and we as the readers got to see how God was using him. And it was such a skillful thing that she did with those books.

**NC:** What's a typical day like for you as an author?

**Sharon Hinck:** I wake up and find ten million reasons to stall and not go to the computer and decide that my grout needs cleaning. I try to do new writing in the morning and then I do editing work in the afternoon, sometimes on the stuff I wrote the day before. I do some editing for other people and so I'll sometimes do that in the afternoon. Because I try to work with that side of the brain later in the day and that side of the brain when I'm fresh in the morning.

**NC:** When someone picks up your book and reads it, what do you hope they walk away with?

**Sharon Hinck:** I just hope that they get a new glimpse of an aspect of God that maybe they didn't know before. Something about the way God loves them, something about the things God is calling them to—especially encouragement when the road is harder than they expected. I think that's the theme of all my novels.

Most of the characters, most of the protagonists are Christians who are struggling to live out their faith and get hit with things they didn't expect. And they have to ask those questions of, "Where is God in the midst of it?" "How does He want me to respond?"

**NC:** What's next for you?

**Sharon Hinck:** I have a couple projects in the works that we'll just have to see where they land and what happens next. I'm still getting up each morning and trying to be available and beat the crows away that flap around my head saying, "Who do you think you are to do this" and "Nobody's interested anyway."

It's that daily battle, but I'm doing revisions on a novel right now that I hope to get to my agent soon.