



# A CHAT WITH THE AUTHOR

Q. Why the Grand Tour?

A. I've always been intrigued with the concept of the tour—of sending young people out to “finish” their education. I think travel continues to do that for me—to expand my world, challenge my preconceived ideas, solidify truth, and eradicate the lies. There's no replacement for seeing a place yourself, knowing it.

Q. Have you been to all the places the Kensingtons and Morgans will journey to in Europe?

A. I'm focusing on places I've been, for the most part. I took my girls to England and France—a fantastic mother-daughter trip. The only location I haven't explored is Vienna. I'll rely on coffee table picture books, some interviews, and lots of Internet research to cover that stop. My daughter Emma and I just spent a great deal of time in Venice and Rome, where books two and three will largely take place. I yanked her out of middle school for her own little Grand Tour. When her big sis was Emma's age, I took her on a research trip to Italy too. It was awesome...for both of us.

Q. That must be hard, convincing the schools to let you pull her out.



A. The girls have to comply with federal regulations, so they do what they have to. But I'm pretty passionate about the power of travel to educate—whether you can get your kids to the nearest national park, another state, or another country. Happily, her teachers are all supportive, and I can weather any letter the admin kicks out. If I was really brave and had more money, we'd homeschool and travel for a whole year. But this is as brave as I get. And, well, the coffers will only fund a couple of weeks on the road. So we'll take what we can get.

Q. Will you take your son somewhere when he's of age?

A. Nah, my husband is already claiming that one. He wants to go someplace manly with him—Scotland or Africa. We'll see. I might set a book in one of those places too and have to go, at least for part of it. But don't tell him yet.

Q. What's next for you, in writing?

A. Book 2 in this Grand Tour series, and a devotional called *31 Upside-Down Prayers*. Both have to be done soon. Back to the library for me, so I can earn more funds to return to Italy!



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the beginning, Cora knows that something's wrong even before she reaches the farm. On board the ship, the passengers discuss how the families of the *Titanic's* victims awoke the night the ship sank, aware that something bad had happened (actual, historic accounts verify this). Has anything like that happened to you or someone you know? Discuss.

2. Cora has several blows that rip apart the only identity she's ever known—as a daughter, as a potential teacher, as a poor girl helping to work the land. She's thrust into a whole new world and forced to examine what really makes her who she is. What do you think was the most powerful realization she had about her identity?

3. Have you ever suffered a blow that made you wonder if you knew who you were? Or a transforming experience that changed who you were in some ways, either externally or internally? What was that life event, and how did it impact and change you?

4. What does living at peace with God mean to you?

5. What's the nicest hotel you've ever stayed in? Did the stay leave you satisfied or wanting more?



6. Cora seems to be resisting Pierre's advances, even though he seems like a Prince Charming character. Why do you think that is?

7. If you were in her shoes, would you do the same? Or is there a part of you that wants to be the princess, swept off your feet? Even if you're married now, what drives the Prince Charming fantasy? Discuss.

8. Keeping up appearances, regardless of actual feelings, was important to many of the characters in this novel. Why do we do that in real life?

9. Cora comes to several key realizations about her faith in this novel. The cathedral scene was a pivotal point (pp. 370–374). Have you thought about these things yourself? Did that scene move you spiritually? If so, how?

10. What defines you or makes you who you are today? Did you ever have to let go of something, consciously deciding it did not define you?

11. List the top three places you'd like to see in the world, and, if you wish, why you want to go there.

12. Most of us spend the majority of our lives close to home. What keeps us from a sense of adventure? What keeps us from exploring and expanding our world? Examine both the practical and the mental/emotional barriers.



# HISTORICAL NOTES

The Grand Tour was popular for several centuries but gradually faded in the 1900s. This twentieth-century rendition is entirely an exercise of my imagination, but it follows the general path the old bears led their clients on—from England, to France, to Austria, and down through Italy. At times, they elected to visit Germany, Spain, Greece, and Turkey as well. But that would've extended the series to five or six books, so we kept to the famous highlights—and my personal favorites.

The copper kings of Montana were true forces, wielding great power in the young, growing state. At one point, there were more millionaires per capita in Helena, Montana, than any other place in the world. Mining made merchants powerhouses, and I loosely based Wallace Kensington on those who lived—and dominated—in Butte. But all depictions of Kensington are figments of my own imagination.

The real Duchess of Northumberland—Lady Edith Percy—died in 1913, and the Duke—Henry George Percy—would have been almost seventy years old. My representation of them, as well as of Lord Carlisle and Lord de Richelieu, is completely fictional—no attempt to realistically depict them was made (other than to utilize their titles and their beautiful estates).

The Eiffel Tower has three observation decks, all of which had stairs and lifts; an Austrian tailor did try to parachute off the first



deck in 1912 with a homemade chute and, indeed, died. But I have no idea if they closed the decks for a time—I only thought it was plausible.

Richelieu was a name I pulled from a French map. Nobles of his stature and wealth largely lived a good distance from the city center of Paris by 1913—out in the countryside, an hour or two away. But for the purposes of this novel, I portray the countryside and grand chateaus to just a fifteen- or twenty-minute carriage ride away. If you go to visit, know you'll have to travel a good distance farther to see such estates.

Some say Marie Antoinette never tended to her own livestock or milked the cows, as our bear shares with the group. Reportedly, she used her “hamlet” as an alternative “drawing room.” My own guide at Versailles shared the milking story, and while it may very well be nothing but myth, I found it charming. Such is the way of history—there are many accounts of similar events, with various perspectives and interpretations. It's rather like how people view fiction, don't you think? Regardless, while I've tried to represent historical facts accurately, I'm no historian. I'm merely a teller of tales...

~ L.T.B.