



Discussion Questions

1. On their way to San Galgano, the family discusses the legend of Excalibur and the sword in the stone. Gabi comments that in her society, people are taught to regard things with suspicion until proven. Do you see that in people you know? What do people believe in without “proof”? Is that a good or bad thing?
2. How old do you think you want to be when you get married? Why?
3. Two-thirds of medieval women were married by the age of nineteen. Some very wealthy noblewomen were as old as twenty-four when they married, but they were a rarity. What do you think marriages would be like today, in contemporary society, if we married earlier rather than later? Would it help or hurt?
4. How did you respond to Gabi’s growing attraction to Rodolfo Greco—and her confusion? Could you understand it? What would you have done in that situation?
5. From the beginning of *Waterfall* to the end of *Torrent*, significant changes happen in the Betarrini family dynamics. In the beginning, the girls feel very separate from their parents. Then they feel the loss of their dad, connect with their mom, and in the end, really become one again. Has your family suffered through a time of disunity and



come out better for it? Are you in the midst of it now? What made or would make it better?

6. Tomas has a unique perspective on God, given his time and place. He's serving as a priest, even when he's no longer representing the Church. What's your thought on how we should share our beliefs with others?

7. Once again, Gabi has to do things she never thought possible—jumping to another building, cauterizing a wound, risking her life, etc.—what's the hardest thing you've ever had to do (even if it wasn't life threatening!)? How'd you feel afterward?

8. In one passage, the book titles for the series are somewhat explained: "My eyes shifted to the trickling river. Come spring, it would be ten times as wide and just as deep. On and on it went, rushing toward the distant horizon. Like time. Like life. Sometimes gently falling from one pool into the other, other times fast and cascading, and still other times narrowing into a funnel, a torrent of knots and waves." Have you experienced life like that? Identify three times in your life that feel like a *Waterfall*, a *Cascade*, and a *Torrent*. Which one describes your life right now?



Historical Notes

The events described herein are entirely fictional. While the story is representative of the volatility of medieval Tuscany, it is merely that...representative. A couple of details in regard to *Torrent*:

The town of Sansicino is based on a Rick Steves show I saw once. In it, he described a hilltop town named Civita di Bagnoregio, which could only be accessed by a bridge. It was founded by the Etruscans and survived two world wars. Today it has a population of ten most of the year and one hundred in the summer. And, yeah, I totally want to visit it someday. How could you not?

We stopped by San Galgano while touring Tuscany—truly one of my favorite excursions of all time (you can read about it on our travel blog, www.TheWorldIsCalling.com), but it was off-season and we could do little more than tour the ghostly, roofless abbey. Up on the hill is the chapel that houses the sword in the stone, but it was closed the day we were there. It's still on my Must-See list. The potential birthplace of the whole Arthurian legend? C'mon! How could you resist? And I took some liberties with the frescoes described within, because they've found alternative drawings beneath the frescoes you can see now. Like the artist changed his mind and just went with what he saw fit for the final version, regardless of what the "rough draft" might've been. As an author, I think that's really wonderful, especially when you can't change it again with but an easy draft from a computer. It was truly a gamble with frescoes.



I didn't do a ton of research into medieval Rome, but there really was a barbershop underneath one of the triumphal arches of the Forum—half buried by this time period. Pretty amazing to think about. The Vatican really was in Avignon at the time—and the Romans did have such a command of their plumbing that they could create elaborate bathhouses with radiant heat, saunas, cold pools, and their versions of hot tubs. When I get to Rome this fall, I look forward to touring Caracalla's public bathhouse (which was closed, last time I went).

Ahh, history. Such rich fodder for a novelist!

—LTB



Dear Torrent Tribe,

Wow, I've loved this ride with you—and Gabi and Lia—in medieval Italy. Thank you for so enthusiastically embracing their story and making it your own. From your comments and emails, I know you've gathered what I'd hoped you'd get out of it. Not only enjoying the entertainment factor, but also investing in the passion, drive, enthusiasm, interest, power, sacrifice, and Great Questions of life that make life, *life*. That's how, for me, this became more of a River of *Life* series than a River of *Time*. Regardless of when you're born, I believe you experience life at a whole different level if you break out of "survival" mode and invest in the plowing/seeding/weeding process, as Gabi and Lia found themselves doing. Then, whether your crop is failing or flourishing, you're *in it...living*.

I've already heard from many of you, wondering if there will be more River of Time books. I'd truly love to come back and hang out with the Betarrini clan and write Lia and Luca's love story, but we have to see how these first three books do. In the meantime, I'm writing a series called *The Grand Tour*, about a group of well-to-do young people in 1914, traveling from England to France to Switzerland, and...wait for it...Italy! (You're totally shocked, right?) Somehow, Italia has captured my heart like few other places, and I'll be eager to return—in my imagination, or in person. The *Grand Tour* books are titled *From This Day Forward*, *To Have and To Hold*, and *As Long as We Both Shall Live*. Look for them to be released June 2012–January 2013 (again, in a short time span, thanks to David C Cook—they know readers agonize as they wait).

I'm heading to Rome soon with my second daughter, off to do research for *As Long as We Both Shall Live*. But I'll be holding



River of Time close in my heart as I go. Please don't lose touch with me—find me on Facebook (“River of Time Series” and “Lisa Tawn Bergren”) and on Twitter (@LisaTBergren) and on my own site (www.LisaBergren.com) if you want to follow along with my travels, writing, contests, and such.

I'm so happy you're one of my readers...which I see is an investment in *me* and, truly, makes *you* one of my friends. Contact me at any time via Facebook, Twitter, or email. I look forward to hearing from you.

Every good thing,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa T. Bergren". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the name.

Join other readers and Lisa on the “River of Time Series” Facebook page. There, you’ll find information about the books, discussion with other fans, and contest and prize information.



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