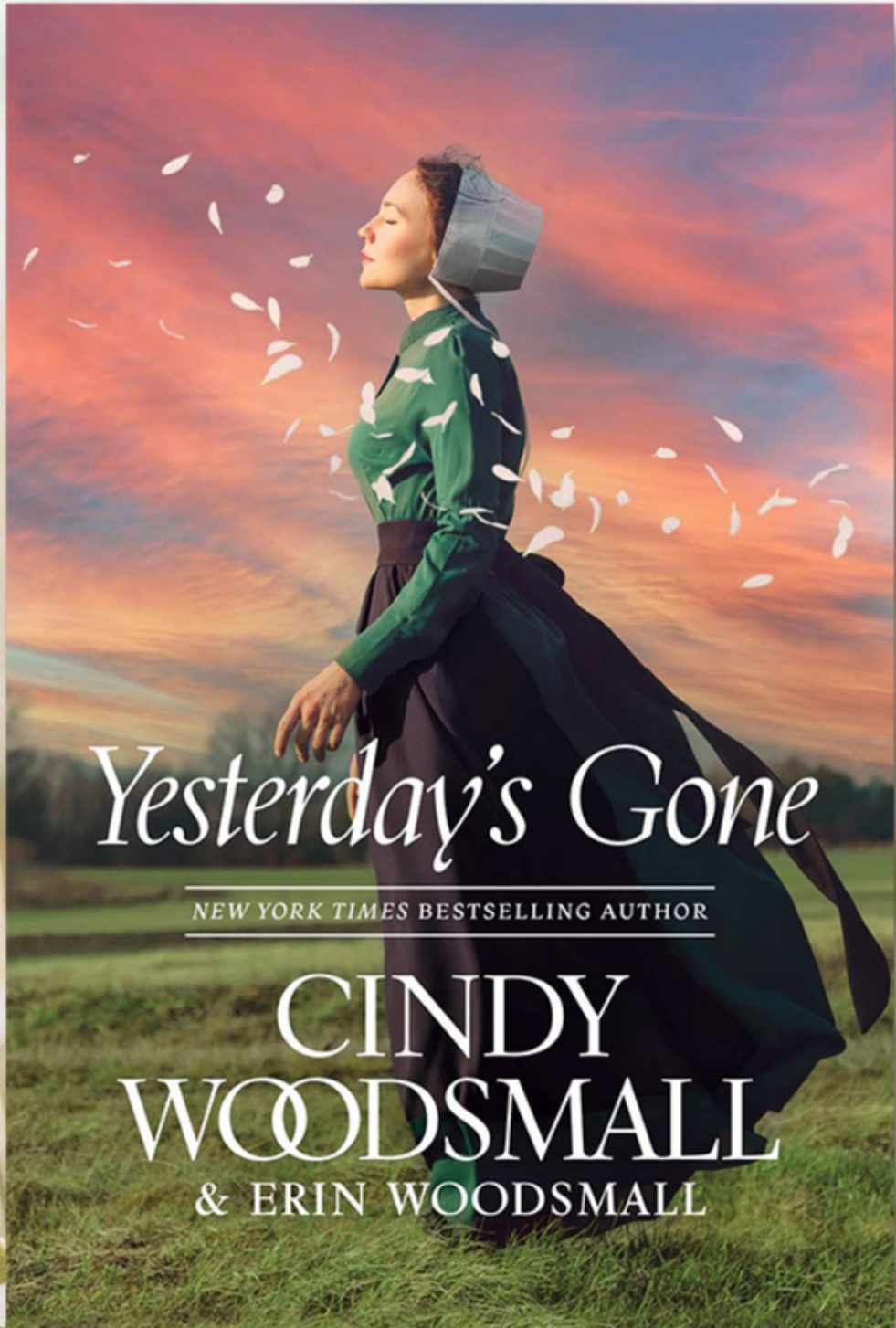


Yesterday's Gone  
BOOK CLUB KIT







# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**CINDY WOODSMALL & ERIN WOODSMALL**

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**Cindy Woodsmall** is a *New York Times* and CBA bestselling author of twenty-five works of fiction and one nonfiction book. Coverage of Cindy's writing has been featured on ABC's *Nightline* and the front page of the *Wall Street Journal*. She lives in the foothills of the north Georgia mountains with her husband, just a short distance from two of her three sons and her six grandchildren.

**Erin Woodsmall** is a writer, musician, wife, and mom of four. She has edited, brainstormed, and researched books with Cindy for almost a decade. More recently she and Cindy have coauthored five books, one of which was a winner of the prestigious Christy Award.

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# Dear Readers,

We're so thrilled you chose *Yesterday's Gone* for your book club. This story is close to our hearts for many reasons. It's a story of grief and hope and that question of "What if?" that allows the imagination to explore ideas, to explore deeper into our own minds and hearts.

Some of the what-if concepts in *Yesterday's Gone* are also part of the classic movie *It's a Wonderful Life*. What would happen if you changed one thing in your life? How essential is a person—or a marriage—to a community? If it were possible to go back in time and change one decision, what repercussions could result from a seemingly small change?

The connection we feel to this story is because we as a family have experienced firsthand some of the same heartbreaking fertility issues that Eliza and Jesse face.

When life is filled with disappointments and grief that seem beyond what we can bear and there is no way of working our way out of the circumstances, we often find ourselves daydreaming or wishing or even praying we could go back and change one event that would alter the current course of our life. We hope the journeys of Eliza, Jesse, Ruth, and Andrew resonate with you, and that by the final pages, you are filled with renewed hope for traveling through life on this beautiful, challenging planet.

Thank you for taking this journey with us to beautiful Appalachian Amish country as we explore these possibilities.

- Cindy & Erin



# Q&A With the Authors



**You've said that *Yesterday's Gone* addresses underlying themes of grief, miscarriage and infant loss, and alcoholism. Why was it important to address these topics within the pages of this book?**

*These sensitive issues—grief, miscarriage, and infant loss—became a part of our personal stories. As storywriters, we long to explore thoughts and emotions deeper. When a tragedy strikes, the human mind is likely to constantly ask, "What if?" This story was our way to explore that. One of the hidden facets of life is that we can't undo the pain without also undoing good. Writing this book crystalized this message for us.*

*Regarding alcoholism, even though it hasn't been a personal struggle, it's a very common struggle that many families face. We wanted to explore this and show how it's possible to rebuild sibling relationships in a healthy way with safe boundaries in place. Cindy did some great research with AA and the ways that they work with families in similar situations.*

**What inspired you to write *Yesterday's Gone*?**

*Erin experienced the same kind of loss as our beloved character Eliza in *Yesterday's Gone*. When we experience a hard loss, our root system to God, to ourselves, to close family members, to friends often sustains trauma. When roots sustain trauma, our family tree may or may not survive it. I thought our family was incredibly strong, but at one point in the grieving process, I wasn't sure we'd make it out whole. Why? How on earth is that even possible? It didn't make logical sense. Through a fictional story, Erin and I dared to explore the strengths and fragilities of our closest relationships.*

Continued on the next page →



**How do you expect the novel to resonate with your audience? What are you most excited for your readers to experience through this story?**

*I think that like us, they'll cry, laugh, be encouraged, and feel the joy of surprise. Our readers are very much rooted in using a portion of their time regularly to add to their whole being, and I think this story can be a fulfilling part of that journey. What are you most excited for your readers to experience through reading this story? I have to make a confession. I've spent entirely too much of my life longing to go back and make different decisions. Some of that kind of thinking can give us perspective, but too much of it is us using our limited energy and valuable time on beating a dead horse or crying over spilled milk. How do we learn to forgive ourselves and accept life for what it is? I'm most excited that while readers are enjoying the journey in Yesterday's Gone, they will soak in new ways of viewing acceptance, new ways of using their energy on what can be changed.*

**What lessons or truths do you hope people take away from Yesterday's Gone?**

*In certain difficult circumstances, we can't stop grief and pain, and if we try too hard to change what is, we simply end up doling out the pain differently rather than erasing it.*

**Can you give us a sneak peek into the main characters in the novel, Eliza Bontrager and Jesse Ebersol?**

*Eliza is a powerhouse of energy and skill, but she can't see it. She sees her place as an Amish woman, and her overwhelming desire is to please her husband, to give him his dream life. Jesse Ebersol is also a powerhouse of energy and skill, and his dream is to break the poverty of his people in the Appalachian Mountains. He sees Eliza's worth. She doesn't. Loss hits them, and the tug-of-war is on!*

**What is one thing you learned about yourselves through writing this book?**

*During the deep spiritual dive that writing this book required, we had to face and answer some difficult questions. For example, regarding self-esteem: What determines a person's worth? The answer that we thought we knew grew new and deeper roots: We're all worthy only by the grace of God and we're all equal despite our circumstances, which can include genetics, income level, place of birth, color of skin, and more. We learned new and deeper ways to own the pain without the pain owning us.*





## Recipes from Eliza Ebersol's Kitchen

Transport your book group to Amish country and make these fun recipes together. Remember to exercise caution as you make the following recipes; ingredients may contain allergens.

Recipes from Erin Woodsmall



# Appalachian Soup Beans

## About the recipe:

Beans are a simple yet hearty meal. Even in lean times, the whole family can eat well, especially if you serve this with skillet corn bread. If using dried beans, you'll need to plan ahead and let the beans soak overnight or use canned beans instead. If you don't have a ham bone, you can use smoked sausage or even extra bacon for flavor.

## Ingredients:

- 1 lb (3 cups) of dried pinto beans or 4 cans of pinto beans
- 4 strips of bacon
- 5 cloves of garlic (or to taste)
- 1 ham bone (left over from a previous meal)
- 1 diced onion
- 1 bay leaf
- 4 cups chicken broth
- Salt and pepper to taste



## Directions:

Rinse dried beans, then pick out and discard any shriveled ones. Place beans in a large bowl and cover with water. Let them soak overnight until they're about double in size. Drain and rinse. In a large Dutch oven, add chopped bacon and cook over medium heat. When it's cooked, remove the bacon but leave the drippings and some grease, draining off excess fat (to your preference). Cook diced onion in drippings over medium heat until softened. Add garlic and cook around 30 seconds, being careful not to burn it. Add 1/2 cup of the chicken broth and loosen any browned bits. Add soaked or canned beans, ham bone, bay leaf, and the cooked bacon. Add the rest of the chicken broth plus enough water to cover beans by 2 inches. Bring it to a boil, then partially cover (or leave a vent open) and simmer on low for 45 minutes. It's important to let steam escape in order to make the beans creamy in texture. If the beans on top dry out, add more water or broth. Season with salt and pepper to taste, and you can also add jalapeños or cayenne pepper for those who like it spicier. I like to wait to add the salt until the end as the bacon, ham, and broth can affect the dish's saltiness.

Serve in bowls with corn bread or over rice.



# Picnic-ready Strawberry Lemonade

When meeting your love at his work site for an awkward meal, it's best to have something to drink when you don't know what to say.

This recipe makes one pitcher.



## Ingredients :

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- 1 1/2 cups white sugar
- 1 cup boiling water
- 1/2 cup fresh or thawed strawberries, pureed
- 10 medium lemons
- 7 cups ice water
- Additional ice

## Directions:

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Make a simple syrup by combining the sugar and boiling water; either add sugar to boiling water on the stove or pour boiling water from a kettle over the sugar. Stir until sugar is dissolved. Cool slightly, then add the strawberry puree. Pour mixture through a strainer into a large pitcher. Juice the lemons, and pour the juice through the strainer into the pitcher. Stir, then add the 7 cups of ice water. Stir again, and add additional ice as needed.

Recipe courtesy of Erin Woodsmall

## About the recipe:

This is a simple favorite. Just like a good marriage, you have to treat the ingredients with care and be careful not to overagitate or else risk a tough dough. The biscuits are only fresh a day—but probably won't last that long. For this recipe, you'll need an oven; a baking sheet; a clean, flat surface that you can work on; a mixing bowl; dry and liquid measurers; and a biscuit cutter (or the rim of a glass or cup dipped in flour).

## Instructions:

Preheat the oven to 425°F. Mix the flour, baking powder, sugar, and salt together with a whisk. Using your fingers or a pastry cutter, work in the butter until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Pour the buttermilk over the mixture and stir gently until just combined. Turn the dough out onto a floured surface and work into a slab about an inch thick. If it's too sticky, add more flour, and make sure it doesn't stick to the work surface. Fold the dough over on itself and press again with more flour. Repeat this process at least three more times to create layers. Make sure you end with a slab of dough one inch thick. Dab flour on the bottom of the biscuit cutter and use it to cut biscuits, placing them on the baking sheet. You'll end up with 6 to 8 biscuits.

Bake in the oven at 425°F for around 12 minutes, or until the tops are lightly golden. When you get the pan out of the oven, brush biscuits with melted butter if desired. Serve with butter, honey, jam, or savory foods like ham and cheese.



# Buttermilk Biscuits

 Recipe courtesy of Erin Woodsmall

## Ingredients:

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tbsp. baking powder
- 2 tsp. sugar
- 1 tsp. salt
- 6 tbsp. cold, unsalted butter.
- 3/4 cup of buttermilk (or plain milk, but add 1 tsp. lemon juice to sour it)
- Extra flour for working with the dough
- Extra butter for topping the biscuits

## Recipe notes:



# Discussion Questions

**To start your group's conversation about *Yesterday's Gone*, read through these questions with your book club and share your responses together.**

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- 1.** Eliza and Jesse choose to have a long engagement, which is not something Amish typically do. Andrew and Ruth also take an unusually long path to get to know each other. Do you feel the characters were justified in their choices, or should they have followed Amish tradition?
- 2.** Eliza carries guilt as well as grief after her repeated pregnancy losses, yet she never blames her husband. If Eliza were your friend, how would you comfort her if she came to you with this self-blame? Are there any Bible passages you'd recommend she read? Do you think society tends to hold women more responsible for infertility or pregnancy losses than men?
- 3.** When Ruth is stuck in the mess Eliza created, she's justifiably angry with her sister. Do you feel Ruth's interactions with Eliza directly after the timeline adjustment are too harsh, not harsh enough, or have an appropriate amount of anger? If the changes couldn't be undone and you were mediating the two sisters through their arguments, what might you suggest they do to mend their relationship?
- 4.** A theme throughout the book is how one tiny change can affect an untold number of other things. Is there another event in Eliza's life you'd suggest changing to get a better outcome? What one event in your life would you be most tempted to change, if given the chance? What do you imagine the ripple effects might be?
- 5.** Many people, like Andrew, go through a deconstruction and reconstruction of their faith when they're young adults. What are some tips or resources you'd recommend to a person like Andrew? What do you think Andrew's future would've be like if he'd remained estranged from the Amish?
- 6.** Were you surprised by what Verna reveals as the true curse? Do you feel that her advice to Ruth and Andrew is fair? If you were Ruth and could ask Verna an additional question, what would it be?



7. After Jesse ends his engagement to Martha, he and Eliza face the bishop's fury and their own families' confusion and disappointment. Could they have handled the situation better? If yes, how so?

8. Once the timeline changed, if Eliza and Jesse had decided to sneak off and marry, they would have had to face the outrage of their community and the consequences of such a rash decision. How would that have affected your view of them?

9. Despite the warnings and setbacks they face, Eliza and the others are determined to undo the time change through rebuilding the cabin and remaking the quilt. Why do you think their efforts were unsuccessful? How do you discern when obstacles should be pushed through and when they're meant to keep you from a certain path? What do you think the characters learn in the end about our own efforts versus God's grace?

10. How did you expect this story to end—with a return to the original timeline or with our characters in the new timeline permanently? If you were writing this book, which ending would you have chosen? Why?

**Your book group questions:** 

Jot down some questions you want to ask in your book club.

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# Amish 101: An Introduction to Amish Fiction from Cindy Woodsmall



The other day, I saw someone on Twitter say, “Wait, Amish fiction is a real thing?” And it occurred to me that there are still a lot of people who haven’t read this genre.

Many of you reading this are quite familiar with stories about the Amish—it’s been one of the most popular genres of inspirational fiction for over fifteen years. Sometimes people ask me *why*. Why write it? Why do readers enjoy it?

I believe there are relatable universal truths that Amish fiction explores in ways other genres struggle to. Let’s talk about some core Amish beliefs and how they translate into good stories.

“’Tis the gift to be simple, ’tis the gift to be free . . .”  
*Simple Gifts*, a Shaker song from 1848

For centuries it’s been a core belief of the Amish that living *simple* is vitally important, and *simple* is also known as living Plain. What does it mean to live Plain? The Plain People have their roots in the Protestant Reformation that swept through Europe in the 1500s. Now members of the Protestant group known as Amish are particularly prevalent in the United States.

Today, there are many sects of Amish, just as there are many denominations among Protestant Christians. There are also Plain Mennonite, Dunkers, and Quakers that fall under living Plain. Those who are considered Plain wear clothing that we can easily recognize as “Amish or Mennonite,” but that’s often where the similarities end.

Amish life and the sacrifices people make to live that lifestyle create a great backdrop for exploring the push and pull, the love-hate relationship we have with modern-day life. That fascinating backdrop and my friendships with Plain folk starting from childhood are my inspirations for writing novels about the Amish.

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Since we can't cover all the sects of Amish in this article, we'll focus on the ways of Old Order Amish. That's where most of my research, personal connections, and novels are centered.

**Old Ways and the *Ordnung*:** The Old Order Amish aim to uphold the Old Ways. The Old Ways are rooted in how life and faith were lived long before the modern age. The *Ordnung* is mostly a verbal set of rules the Amish live by, passed down from one generation to the next. In order to join the Amish faith, before they are baptized each person must agree to keep the *Ordnung* and to yield to their ministers' judgment calls on all matters as they arise.

**Rumschpringe:** Amish young adults usually join the church between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four, but before that happens they have a period called *rumschpringe*. The word means *running around*. The true purpose of the *rumschpringe* is threefold: to give freedom for an Amish young person to find an Amish mate, to give extra freedoms during the young adult years so each person can decide whether to join the faith, and to provide a bridge between childhood and adulthood. Singings provide a weekly gathering for those in their *rumschpringe*.

**Singings:** Each week has planned singings for single Amish only, although there are always chaperones present. These singings usually take place on either a Saturday or Sunday evening. The singing may take place in a home or barn or even outside when weather permits. Wherever the singing takes place, the young men sit on one side and the young women on the other side. After the singing, during refreshment time, around a bonfire or on a hayride, or just gathering in groups to talk, they are free to mingle. The chaperones aim to have a watchful eye while also giving space to the young people. But if a young man and woman want time alone, they'll need to go for a buggy ride. This is often an endearing practice to us and to Amish parents, where, before the singing, an Amish young man grooms a horse and cleans up a buggy to drive to the gathering, with the hope of impressing his crush. There is usually an open invitation for Amish youth from other districts to come to any singing.

**Dating as Old Order Amish:** When Amish are fifteen or sixteen, they join a youth group. The parents of the youth put a lot of effort into providing many community events for their young people, such as singings and planned gatherings at various homes that include having bonfires and playing outdoor or indoor games. These functions encourage visitors from other districts, and during these gatherings Amish young people socialize and meet potential dates.

**Amish Businesses:** Common professions for Amish men are farming, carpentry (like cabinetry and furniture building), and construction (like building cabins, which is what Jesse does in *Yesterday's Gone*). Although homes do not allow grid wiring for electricity or phones, Amish businesses make certain allowances when necessary. But Amish most often rely on other forms of power when possible: generators, rechargeable batteries, or solar power.



There was a time when all Amish men made a living in one of the vocations listed above, but life in the US has changed a lot over the decades, and it has affected farming, construction, and carpentry for the men. More Amish men now hold “Englisch” jobs, like Eliza’s father in *Yesterday’s Gone*, who works in a local feed mill.

Before a woman is married, she is free to work in a store, restaurant, or bakery or to be an Amish schoolteacher. She can clean Englisch homes, sew quilts, or work with textiles (weaving on a loom and such). There are other vocations Amish women enjoy too, but before her wedding day, she’s expected to quit any full-time or part-time jobs and put taking care of her husband and home first. The rules for women working outside the home are easing some, but careers are frowned on until the children are older. Still, women are allowed to have something on the side—babysitting in their home, an occasional cleaning of an Englisch home, and roadside stands selling produce from their garden are a few ways they can bring in money without having a set job.

**Why write Amish novels?** There are so many reasons, but one that stands out is the connection we share. All of us experience an inner tug of war as we try to navigate modern times while being faithful in all that matters and also carving out time to become our unique selves. We practice trying to live free while thriving within healthy boundaries. The Amish aim to navigate modern times while holding on to the Old Ways, but they can’t always make their inner selves fit inside the box their community holds dear. They want to . . . or sometimes they don’t want to. Those places are where stories get interesting, because we can see ourselves in that same but totally different tug of war.

All of us must make sacrifices of what we will and won’t allow in our lives, and those decisions can benefit us or cost us dearly. Amish life is an endearing and heartrending reminder of all we hold dear.

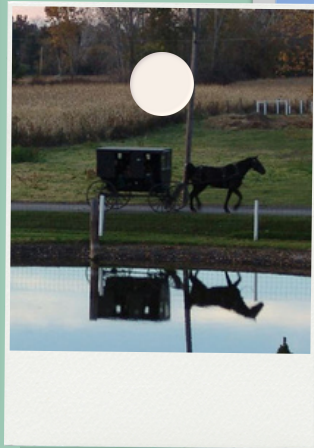
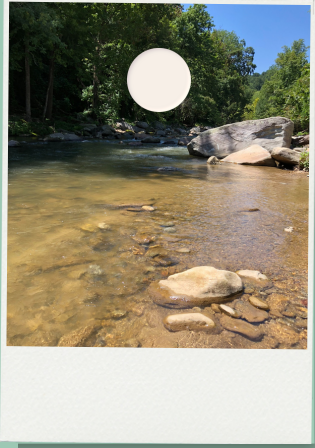
"The joy of being alive seemed to radiate from her  
and splash onto him. He nodded and gestured  
toward the stone in her hand. "

*Yesterday's Gone* by Cindy Woodsmall & Erin Woodsmall

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Mountain creek

Mountain overlook



Horse and buggy



Step into the setting of *Yesterday's Gone* with these photos.

Photos courtesy of Erin Woodsmall



Field and farm



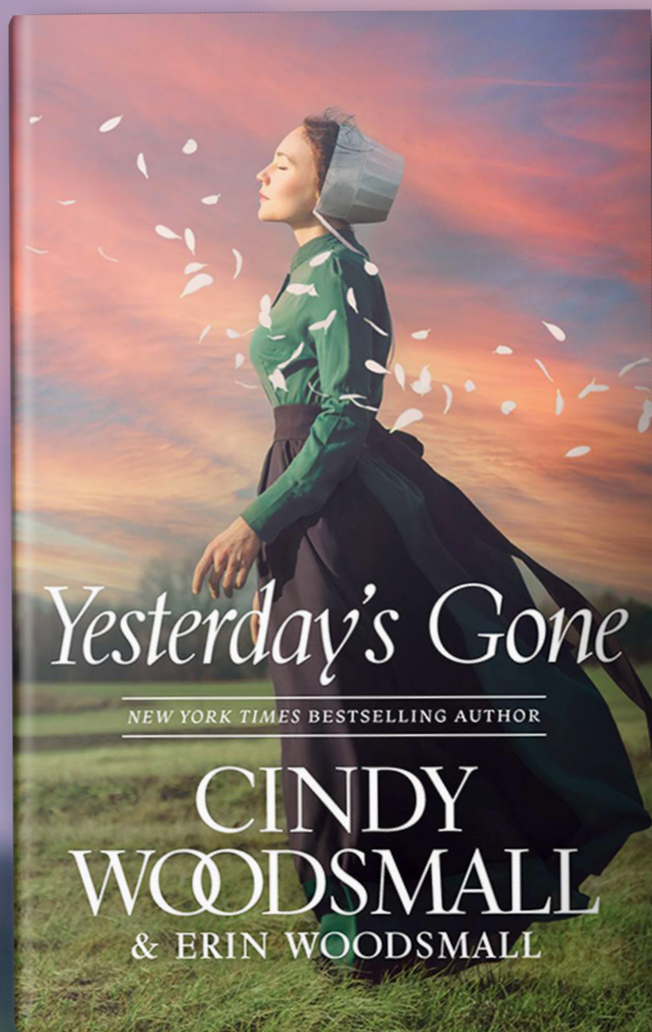
# MY BOOK CLUB NOTES

DATE

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*Thanks for choosing*



*for your book club!*



A photograph of a dark brown horse pulling a black carriage on a paved road with double yellow lines. The background shows a rural landscape with a bare tree and a clear sky.

# Keep an eye out for the next novel by Cindy Woodsmall & Erin Woodsmall

Coming in 2023 from Tyndale  
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