



January 2024

Happy New Year, Elmer!

December flew by quickly for me. The holidays were a blessing, family a joy, but the play of the Kansas City Chiefs a disappointment! (They clinched their division anyway.) Other December highlights:

- We enjoyed listening to the Olathe Civic Band concert. A friend plays trumpet in the band.
- Walking through the light displays at the Overland Park Arboretum
- A party with our Life Group
- Attending a Christmas Eve service with our daughter and her boyfriend.

I'm excited about this newsletter. In addition to a book review, I've included information on promotions for other books you might find interesting. I am including the usual short story, but this time I'm sharing the first chapter of the novella I'm writing. I'd love to hear your comments.

Speaking of my writing efforts . . .

## **Writing Update**

My goal was to complete a 16 chapter novella by the end of December. Alas, I failed! The research lasted half a week longer than I anticipated. I also didn't factor in the holidays when I set the goal. I have 11 chapters drafted and hope to complete the draft and editing by the end of January.

What's it about? In 1855, Hiram Vogel and his new bride journey from New England and settle in the Kansas Territory. Hiram desires the end of slavery, but believes he must keep himself separate from the worldly affairs of votes, government and militias. Can he remain true to his convictions when pro-slavery forces threaten him and his neighbors?

## **Want to be a Beta Reader?**

To check the quality of the novella, I'm looking for beta readers. If you want to read a PDF file and answer a short questionnaire by email, please reply. I estimate it will be about 25,000 words.

## Reviewed for You

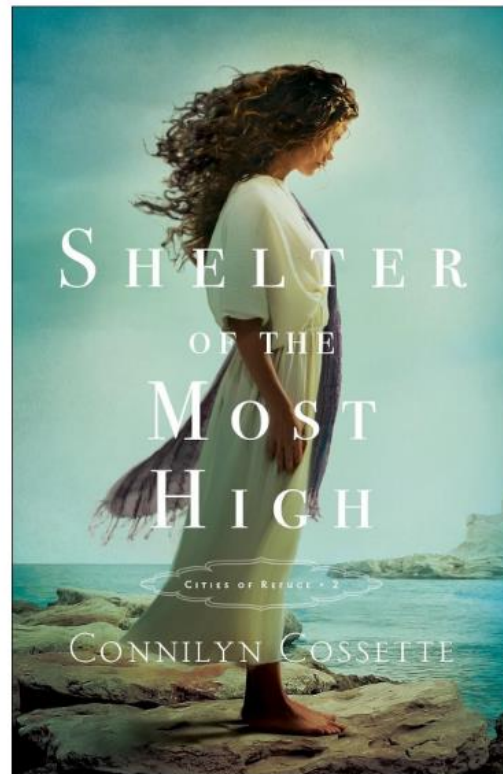
*Shelter of the Most High* is a Christy Award-winning novel by Connilyn Cossette, published by Bethany House in 2018. The story focuses on Sofea and Eitan a few years after the Israelites conquer the land under Joshua.

Sofea, the daughter of a pagan high priest on the island of Sicily, and her cousin are captured by enemies and transported to the coast of Canaan. After the girls escape, the teens arrive in Kedes, a city of refuge. Eitan, a young man, has lived in the city for eleven years but chafes at the need to remain within the city boundaries. Intrigue, betrayal, danger and a murder plot engulf Sofea and Eitan as their feelings for each other intensify.

The book provides an imaginative look at life in a city of refuge immediately prior

to the time of Judges. The author's notes include research supporting Sofea's background and her other descriptions of life and culture. The book also includes ten questions a book club can use for discussion.

The book alternates between the points of view of Sofea and Eitan. The voice and style of these points of view is much the same, which can be confusing, but the chapter headings indicate when a POV switch is made. I found the book interesting and enjoyed the depiction of life in the time period. It made me appreciate what living in a city of refuge may have entailed. (For biblical details on the cities of refuge, see Numbers 35.)



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Continued on next page

## Promotions



### Win Six Books!

Enter for your chance to win six Christian historical novels highlighting five centuries of faith and courage! Explore stories ranging from pre-Reformation Italy, the mysterious colony at Roanoke, and the American Revolution to the Old West, twentieth-century Canada, and the American home front of WWII. First-place winner (US mailing address only) will receive signed paperbacks. Second-place winner will receive e-book copies. **Starts:** Monday, January 8, 2024 **Ends:** Monday, January 22, 2024

[Enter to Win](#)

### \$0.99 During January (e-book)

**Can a soldier stand for his country without bowing his knee to evil?**

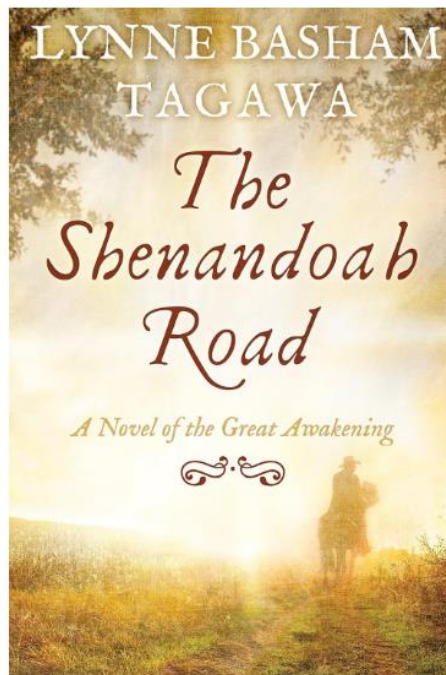
American-born Frederick Smith has left everything he's ever known to return to his German homeland. While he tries to remain uninvolved in the terror that surrounds him, his thirst for adventure and camaraderie draw him into the army of the Third Reich.

Spurred by the friendship of the Battalion Chaplain and a newfound faith, Freddie begins to find a new meaning in the words *Gott Mit Uns* (God with us). But as tide of the war turns, his closest comrades begin to fall. Will he live to serve Germany?



[Buy at Amazon](#)





**\$1.99 During January  
(e-book)**

*A 2019 Selah Awards Finalist*

**An injured Indian. A dangerous ruffian. But her greatest foe is her own heart.**

John Russell's heart aches from the loss of his wife, but the Shenandoah Valley frontiersman needs to marry again for his daughter's sake. At first he believes he has found the right young woman, but his faith falters when time reveals she isn't quite what she seemed. Can he truly love her?

Unlike her disgraced sister, Abigail Williams obeys the Commandments. At least, she thinks herself a Christian until a buckskin-clad newcomer courts her. If she confesses her lack of faith, will John continue to love her?

[Buy at Amazon](#)

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I hope you enjoy the short story below. Please reply if you'd like to be a beta reader for the novella. As always, if you have any comments on the newsletter or story, please reply.

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**Short Story by Elmer Fuller**

## **Prairie of Hope and Conflict**

Kansas Territory, March 27, 1855

Hiram Vogel plodded beside the wagon on the rutted trail running north toward the promise of town. He planted a long pole like a cane with each step. The afternoon sun warmed the back of his coat even as the wind threatened to whisk his black, wide-brimmed hat away. Dust tickled his nose, stirred by the creaking wheels of the line of wagons behind him and the hooves of the oxen pulling them. Most of the people would

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journey on, but he would stop and build his dream here.

Rachel walked beside him, her long, dark blue dress pressed to the back of her legs by the wind. The bulk of her skirt flapped before her shins with flashes of her petticoat. Her large bonnet was tied securely under her chin and wrapped close to her face, though the wind had loosened strands of her blonde hair which danced in front of her cheeks, red from the chill and wind. At least he had a beard to warm his jaw. Why she agreed to marry him, knowing his plan to settle in Kansas, he would never know.

Dr. Charles Robinson, their guide, cantered a horse from the front of the wagons and stopped beside the trail. A warm smile opened in the big man's thick, gray-streaked beard. "How are our newlyweds today? Are you excited to arrive at your new home?"

"There is much work to do before this will be our home."

"Right you are, Hiram, right you are." Dr. Robinson kicked his horse and rode toward the end of wagon train.

A lightness lifted his chest and overcame the weariness in his steps. The land stretched away more barren than the papers had described. A large hill rose on his left covered with the brown stems of grass rustled by the wind to reveal hints of green. An arm of the hill ran closer to the trail. At the base, dried grass over a foot high covered the valley stretching north, marked at regular intervals with crude stakes. Room for him to build a family and a new life.

"I can't believe how warm it is. We left snow in Boston only two weeks ago." Rachel's blue eyes scanned his face and his heart warmed.

"Yes, my wife. Farmers will be able to plant much sooner here." She smiled at being called his wife, his term of endearment for her.

"We'll need to clear a garden and plant potatoes soon . . . my husband."

He grinned at her term for him.

She brushed a strand of hair back under her bonnet. "I am glad to arrive. I need a restful night. The travel has left me weary."

"Ja, it has been a long road." He blew out a breath like a blacksmith's bellows. The journey had been even longer than the actual travel in cramped railroad cars, the slow cruise in the steamboat and fifty miles walking beside the wagon. It started after their marriage in October when he had gathered his savings and their gifts of money to arrange the trip to this new territory. He had packed his tools and their small lot of household goods in the midst of constant arguments. Father had urged him to stay in their community even on the day they left to join the group in Boston. Father thought



settling in Kansas a foolish notion, but it was his path to a better future, a place where he could build a good life and help a worthy cause.

“Is that a house?” Rachel nodded at a small, square shack sitting in a large rectangle of bare dirt. Chunks of black dirt the thickness of bricks, only longer, were stacked into walls no higher than a short woman. The sod blocks bristled with the ends of roots. Bundles of grass thatched the shallow arched roof. Smoke flew away in a flat line from a crude chimney of mud-covered sticks running up one end.

“I believe that is a sod house, or soddy.”

Her eyes opened wide and she placed a hand against her chest. “It looks smaller and . . . cruder than the descriptions. Will we have to live in one?”

“Only for a time and only if I can’t buy lumber. The town started last fall. They had to build something for the winter. I’ll have all summer to build something for us, though we may need to sleep under the canvas cover of the wagon for a time.”

He prodded the nearest ox with the pole. Rachel must be a shocked at the prospect of living in a sod home instead one like her father’s two-story house with white siding. Even the wooden shed on her father’s farm was bigger and better than the soddy or the wagon.

Dr. Robinson trotted his horse past and returned to the head of the wagon train. They slowly pulled into the new town, passing a few other sod houses, wagons, a couple of tents, shacks sided with rough, wood shingles and tent-sized frames covered in thatch. The frames resembled small, gable roofs set on the ground. Beside many, the bare frames of houses under construction stood. He smiled. The town would provide much work.

“Stop here.” Dr. Robinson waved the wagons into a line two abreast beside a large building sided with prairie grass thatch. It also resembled a roof set on the ground, but was at least fifty feet long, twenty wide and the peak reached taller than a man. Sod blocks formed the end walls and rose three feet up the long, side walls. The wooden frame of a building the same size stood nearby.

A crude cabin with a window and door of slabs stood a short distance away. The round logs still held bark. Mud and sticks chinked the space between the logs. Such a waste to use entire logs rather than cut it into lumber. At least the cabin was tall enough a man could stand erect within it. A few other buildings stood and defined the streets. Several more lots held buildings in various stages of construction.

Hiram joined the crowd gathering around Dr. Robinson, who lifted his voice. “Welcome to Lawrence. You can stay here in our welcome house tonight.” He motioned to the long building of sod and thatch. “It will provide a place to sleep and meals, though you will need your own blankets. Our company is very glad you’ve come to Kansas. This

territory needs men of conscience who will vote to bring another free state into the Union. The election for the territorial legislature is this Friday, so you'll have a couple of days to settle."

A man waved a hand. "Did you say we can vote? We've just arrived. I thought they conducted a census in January and February."

"Yes, you can vote even if you are not listed in the census. Those of you traveling further west will also be able to vote at your destination."

Hiram licked his lips and a murmur ran through the crowd, stirring excitement. All the men in the party had journeyed here to vote as much as build a new life. They all wanted Kansas to be a free state.

Dr. Robinson raised a hand. "You simply need to swear an oath that you are a resident. I know some of you will buy a tract in town tomorrow. Others of you will move into the country around Lawrence to scout for a farm claim. However, if you stay in this area, please assemble here on Thursday evening. We'll discuss the men who will stand for election who are dedicated to make a free state."

Hiram stroked his beard while Dr. Robinson extended his speech. Dare he vote so soon? How could he swear an oath? After a few minutes, the doctor dismissed the crowd and Hiram turned back toward the wagon.

Rachel fell into step beside him, her mouth pulled tight. She crossed her arms and leaned close. "Our guide is very committed to the abolition of slavery."

"It is a noble cause, one that takes commitment."

"Yes, it is evil, but we came to build a home. To hear him, one would think voting is more important than building a house or planting a crop."

His heart beat like a trotting horse and he sucked in a deep breath. She needed to hear his plans sometime. "Maybe I will vote."

"Vote? How can you consider it?" She spoke with a shaky voice. She stared at him with puckered eyebrows and gaping lips.

His throat tightened. "As you said, slavery is evil. A vote can keep slavery out of the new state." Of course, it wasn't that simple, though he wished it were.

She lifted her chin. "Let the others vote. The company is helping many people from New England, all seek to make this a free state."

“Yes, but few have journeyed here thus far. The groups that follow us this year will miss the vote.”

“Hiram, how can you maintain separation from evil if you participate in civic affairs? We must have no fellowship with the world. You know what Scripture says.”

Tension squeezed his stomach. He should have talked to her sooner. “I don’t want to participate in the world’s evil. I just think the evil of slavery needs to end.”

“Is this why we have journeyed across this continent? Just so you can vote?”

He had said too much. She wasn’t ready. At least the vote for the legislature was important, but not the critical vote. “No, I did not come just to vote. I came to build a life here . . . with you. A growing town will bring much work for carpenters. I explained the opportunities here. They are greater than the ones back home. My wife, you know this.”

“Yes, but you said nothing about voting.”

She scowled even though he had softened his tone and used his term of endearment. It usually brought a smile. Would this become an argument to mar the evening after a long day?

“Hiram, you surprise me. Do you not hold the views of our church, of your father?”

His chest tightened and warmth climbed his neck. She did not know his father like he did. “My father is a very righteous man who makes his views well known.”

“Even if you vote, which is an entanglement in the world, you will also be required to take an oath. You know our Lord forbids it. ‘Swear not at all,’ he said. ‘But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.’”

“I know the words of our Lord.” She was right. How could he swear an oath? He reached up and gripped the back edge of their wagon. “I only said maybe I would vote, not that I would. It seems a small act to help free the Africans. But you are right, my wife.”

She smiled and stepped close. Did using his endearment change her mood or the words “you are right”?

He climbed into the wagon and rummaged for the blankets. At least he had appeased her and he wouldn’t face an evening of silence. He shook his head. The opportunity to help end an evil didn’t tempt her into involvement with the world. Would she remain



committed to strict separation from the world while living so far from their own people? Could they live in this new community without friendships with people outside the church?

He had talked with other men on the journey. Some were good, hard-working men, though they followed different views of Scripture. They didn't sleep away the day in the train cars or lounge on the riverboat to play cards and drink like some. They talked of keeping Kansas free as much as they shared dreams of building a new life. They wanted to end slavery, to take action, to vote. Perhaps their votes would be enough to keep the territory free.

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**Author's Note:** The New England Emigrant Aid Company led several groups of free state sympathizers to the Kansas Territory, seeking to overcome the migration of people from slave states, including Missouri and Kansas. Hiram and Rachel are fictional characters, though the date of their arrival, the vote and the description of Lawrence are taken from historical records.

**Did you like this story? Forward it to a friend!**

