

Q & A



Feathers of Hope A Novel

April 19, 2022 | \$18, 384 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0062-5

An Interview with Sharon Garlough Brown

What sparked the idea for this next book, *Feathers of Hope*?

Sharon Garlough Brown: *Feathers of Hope* is the third book in my Shades of Light series, which explores issues of mental illness, grief, and loss from a spiritual formation angle. In *Feathers of Hope* I wanted to journey with the characters through a season of transition and change, much as we've been living through during the pandemic. Though the book takes place in the summer of 2018, the characters are wrestling with many of the questions and issues we've been facing: How do we navigate upheaval with hope? How do we experience God's love and care for us when we're worn out? How do we practice loving and forgiving well? What does the call to live justly and mercifully look like, especially regarding race?

Feathers of Hope is a story about embracing discomfort and disequilibrium with hope. It's about growing in confidence that the Lord is stretching and enlarging us into deeper Christlikeness through the circumstances and conflicts that test us. It's about seeing God's call with fresh eyes and being awake and receptive to the Holy Spirit's stealthy work in us and among us. The themes are hard, but the hope is real.

How is *Feathers of Hope* connected to your previous books?

Sharon: *Feathers of Hope* takes place in the same town as *Sensible Shoes*, nine years after that series ends, and the *Sensible Shoes* characters make cameo appearances. Katherine Rhodes, the retreat leader from *Sensible Shoes*, is one of the main characters in the Shades of Light series. In *Feathers of Hope*, Katherine is getting ready to retire, and she offers one final retreat. Readers are invited to participate in her three-session retreat about stewarding love, affliction, and grace with invitations for prayer and reflection along the way. Like my other books, *Feathers of Hope* includes spiritual practices that help us remain attentive to the presence of God. It's a deep dive into the inner life of each of the characters who become mirrors for seeing ourselves more clearly.

Which character out of all your books do you most resonate with and why?

Sharon: Each of my characters received parts of me—the good, the bad, and the being transformed. In terms of my own significant spiritual growth, Hannah (the pastor on sabbatical in the *Sensible Shoes* series) shared in common with me my conversion out of anxious striving and defining myself by what I did for God, to being at rest in his love. Her discovery of God's particular affection for her mirrored my own joyful discoveries when I was in my midthirties.

Now in my early fifties, I have more access to Katherine's inner life. At seventy-five, she has lived a life shaped by suffering and sorrow, and she lives with such grace, compassion, and wisdom. I deeply admire her. In *Feathers of Hope*, her awakening to her own blindness regarding issues of race and justice reflects my own over the past couple of years. It has been such a gift to share the journey with her. I've been stretched and enlarged by keeping her company in her wrestling.

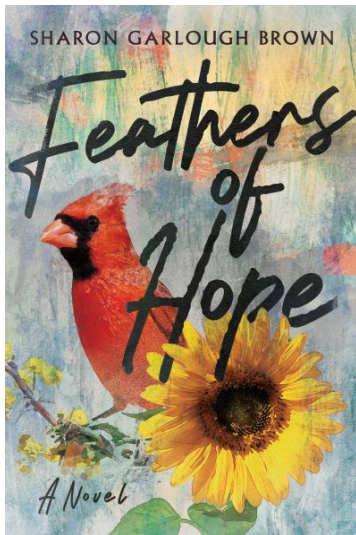


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What is your writing and discernment process like as you put these characters and stories together?

Sharon: I like to say that my characters and stories are discovered rather than created. The only way I know how to write fiction is to take the posture of a pastor or spiritual director who creates space and listens deeply, both to the characters and to the Holy Spirit's leadings. I ask questions and wait for them to reveal what they want me to know. Their journeys with God and with each other need to emerge in ways that are true to them. That means giving them freedom to walk on and off the page, to respond to God and resist God. I weep over their losses. I rejoice over their progress and healing. And I get frustrated when they refuse to say yes to God's invitations. I have to practice patience and compassion along the way. And when I see myself reflected in their fears, sin, or resistance, I'm invited to receive God's grace and compassion and patience for me too.

My writing process is prayer. It's a rich and joyful—and sometimes emotionally and spiritually exhausting—journey with them.

What have been some of the greatest personal lessons you have learned in writing the *Sensible Shoes Series* and these additional books?

Sharon: When I finished writing *Sensible Shoes*, I realized that nothing traumatic had happened to any of the characters while they were under my watch and care as an author. I inherited their stories of loss and pain, but each of them was experiencing transformation and healing during the book. As I prayed, I sensed the Lord ask me whether I would be willing in future books to let my characters suffer without trying to mitigate it or rescue them from it. I offered my yes. And I have wept with all of them since then. Receiving their stories and keeping them company during their suffering has enlarged my compassion and revealed other areas in my life where I might be tempted to short-circuit God's deeper healing work by jumping in to rescue or control. All this has impacted the way I hold space for the real-life people I'm privileged to companion.



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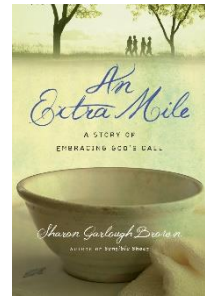
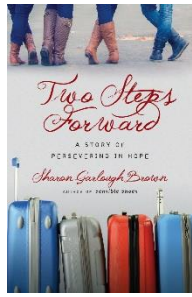
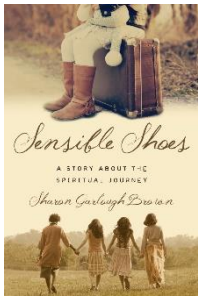
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In a season of loss and change, Wren Crawford and Katherine Rhodes share the journey as companions in sorrow and hope. In this sequel to *Shades of Light* and *Remember Me*, fans of the Sensible Shoes series will not only be able to attend Katherine’s final retreat sessions at New Hope but also encounter old and new friends along the way. An accompanying six-week study guide provides guidance for individuals or groups participating in a discussion around the book.

Author of the Bestselling Sensible Shoes Series

Sharon Garlough Brown is a spiritual director, speaker, and cofounder of Abiding Way Ministries, providing spiritual formation retreats and resources. She is the author of *Shades of Light: A Novel* and the follow-up titles, *Remember Me* and *Feathers of Hope*. Sharon is also the author of the bestselling Sensible Shoes Series, which includes these spiritual fiction novels and their study guides:



A graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary, Sharon has served on the pastoral staff of congregations in Scotland, Oklahoma, England, and most recently in West Michigan, where she copastored with her husband, Jack, for many years. In March 2013 her book *Sensible Shoes* was named one of television personality Kathie Lee Gifford’s “favorite things.”

Sharon loves hearing from her readers and responding to their questions about her writing process, the Sensible Shoes characters, and the inspiration behind her work. Visit her website at sharongarloughbrown.com.



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