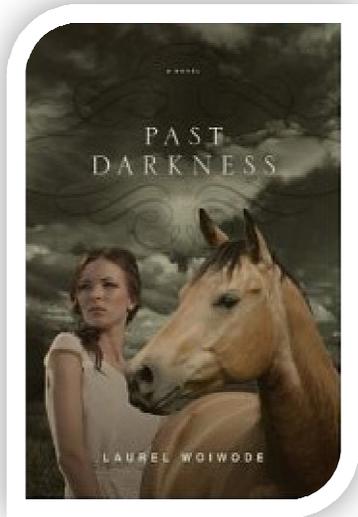


## Readin' & Writin' with Lauraine- June 2013



Songs keep going through my mind as I think of this month. Like this one from Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Carousel*: "*June is bustin' out all over, all over the meadows and the hills.*" Or from *Porgy and Bess*: "*Summertime and the livin' is easy.*"

That one I argue with. Whose summer is easy anymore? Yes, people take vacations, but then they need time to recuperate from the vacation to get back into the swing of things. But reading a good book is a vacation that we can take anytime, all year long.

Even though June is the kick-off month for Rescue Summer in Tehachapi (a series of contests and events to benefit local animal rescue organizations that keeps me busy), I'm getting my column done a bit ahead of deadline. I have resolved that when I finish a good book, I will write the column right away, before another good book comes along and pleads for a column, too.

*Past Darkness* by Laurel Woiwode showed up in my mail box. I met the author two years ago at a Scandinavian Festival called Norsk Hostfest in Minot ND. She was helping her father, Larry Woiwode, who for years has written books set in the upper Midwest region. Laurel said she was working on book of her own. I said, "Send it to me. I'd love to read it when you finish it." So when the book showed up, I was glad she remembered.

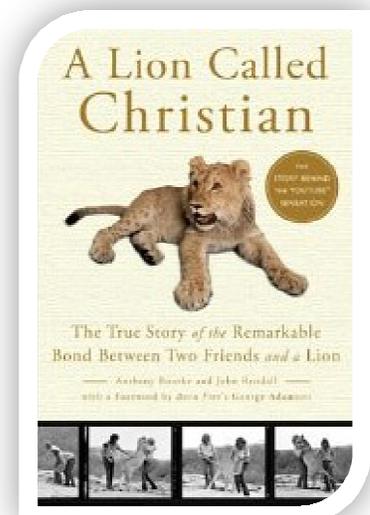
The photo of the beautiful buckskin horse on the cover insured that I would read the book. The dark clouds fit the title. The story, told in first person by Gabrielle, started gently, making me think, “ah, a coming of age story”, as the heroine is fifteen years old.

But not far into the story, Gabrielle’s life is ripped apart and the Chicago city girl is forced to go live with her aunt and uncle on a ranch in western North Dakota. I felt like I was living on that ranch with her, suffering with her, withdrawing right along with her, and then learning to love the land in spite of herself.

Grief is a terrible thing at any time, losing one’s parents at fifteen can take years work through. Gabrielle’s aunt and uncle are good people who don’t know how to help her. As one reviewer wrote “A wonderful story of hope, faith and forgiveness. And also courage – the courage to face our fears and overcome them.”

I heartily recommend *Past Darkness* for readers from teens on up. Laurel has done a superb job of weaving the love of the land into this young girl’s life as she grows up. If I didn’t already love that part of this world, I would fall in love with it after reading this enthralling tale. I’m looking forward to more books from Laurel Woiwode. This one will be a tough act to follow.

I also finished *A Lion Called Christian*, a true story that was quite a YouTube hit. Two men buy a lion cub from Herrods Department Store in London and when Christian gets too big to handle, they take him to Africa to be rehabilitated back into the wild (similar to *Born Free* of so many years ago). In fact



George Adamson of *Born Free* fame is the man who teaches Christian to live the life of a wild African lion. Anthony Bourke and John Rendall return to Africa a year later to see Christian again, and then visit another year later. The blurb on the cover reads “The true story of the remarkable bond between two friends and a lion.” While I’ve never wanted a lion of my own, I really enjoyed this little book.

Meanwhile I have to finish the book I am writing titled *Heaven Sent Rain*. It will come out next summer. This August, *Wake the Dawn* will be released. And *An Untamed Heart*, the prequel of Ingeborg Bjorkund’s life in Norway before she came to America, will hit the shelves on October 1. I know a lot of readers have been waiting for that one.

Until next time,

*Happy readin’ & writin’ from Lauraine*