



Seeds of *Summer* Book Review

by DeAnna Power

the most dire circumstances into seeds of hope. Spanning the Seasons of the Tallgrass, each story in this series reveals the struggle of the people who live there and the dreams they have for the land until they come full-circle in a never-ending cycle, just as man comes full-circle in his understanding of God.

According to Romance Writers of America's 2009 survey 74.8 million readers read at least one romance novel in 2008 with the core group being 29 million readers. I like to think I'm a decent, "tough" cowgirl and wouldn't normally read a romance novel. I have to admit, I read one and enjoyed it. I found the statistics comforting in the fact that I wasn't alone.

Naturally, the book had my attention as the author called the Miss Rodeo America office about two years ago asking questions for a book idea she had. In addition the main character, Natalie Adams and I share a common bond. As a native Kansan and former Miss Rodeo Kansas I've spent plenty of time driving through and visiting the Flint Hills of Kansas, where the book takes place.

Overall this novel truly shows unconditional love from a Biblical standpoint and genuine love between a young pastor and his new found friends. Forgiveness and acceptance are reoccurring themes expressed throughout the book.

I had the opportunity to interview the author, Deborah Vogts from Erie, KS.

Summary

Seeds of Summer is heart-warming contemporary romance set in the Flint Hills of Kansas where a former rodeo queen abandons her dreams in order to care for her deceased father's ranch and her two half-siblings, only to realize with the help of a young new pastor that God can turn even

How long have you been a published author?

My debut book, *Snow Melts in Spring*, released in July 2009. It is the first book in the Seasons of the Tallgrass series, which are contemporary inspirational romance books published by Zondervan.

How many books are in the Seasons of the Tallgrass series or how many are you planning?

Zondervan contracted me for three books, with options on the fourth. I'm hoping to be able to finish out the seasons with them, and I'm working on the third book, *Blades of Autumn* now, which will release in spring 2011.

How are the books in the series connected?

The Seasons of the Tallgrass series is connected by the fictional ranching community of Diamond Falls, which is set in fictional Charris County, KS, in the heart of the Flint Hills. Each book will stand alone, concentrating on a different season of ranching with a new family of characters, yet readers will see their favorite characters from previous books because they are part of the community.

What inspired you to write this book about a Miss Rodeo Kansas?

My husband and I read lots of horse magazines at our house, two of those, *Western Horseman* and *AQHA's America's Horse*. So, when he's finished with a magazine, I'll go through with an eye open for possible story ideas. I'll tear out pages of articles, or even pictures for possible characters, and then I'll file those papers in an idea file.

When I'm ready to write a new story, that's the first place I'll go. So, to make a long story short, many of the pictures I'd filed away happened to be of past Miss Rodeo America queens. From there, my imagination soared. I began asking questions like, what if this happened? Or what if she did this? Plus, in creating the Seasons of the Tallgrass, each of the stories have a strong female character. For *Snow Melts in Spring*, you meet Mattie Evans, a large animal veterinarian, and in *Blades of Autumn*, you'll read about Clara Lambert as she runs a small town café. I knew I wanted to have one book that had a female rancher in it, and that's how Natalie's story was born.

What kind of research did you do in preparation for this book?

A lot of online research, as well as all those articles I mentioned above. I also had a great deal of help from those at the MRA headquarters who answered specific story questions and helped with possible story scenarios.

DeAnna Power, Raeana Wadhams, and Amy Wilson (MRA 2008) all helped a great deal in working out my scenario, as well as answering many small questions that would help lend authenticity to the story.

What did you learn about the Miss Rodeo America Pageant?

Most of my research dealt with MRA. The story begins in Las Vegas with Natalie losing the pageant or winning first-runner up, depending on how you want to look at it. For her, it was a heartbreaker. Then the story jumps right in to her current dilemma after her father dies and she's back at the ranch. I dump a lot on this girl at the start of the story, so she has a great deal to overcome. But that's what memorable stories are made of—people who overcome horrible odds, and become an even stronger person for it.

So back to your question, I learned a ton of information about MRA—and loved every minute of it. I tacked pictures of past queens in various outfits on my storyboard (which is a bulletin board filled with pictures of my characters, their homes, pets, etc.). And because Amy Wilson was the current MRA, I followed her story online and in magazines. My research pinnacle last summer when I met Amy at her home in Colby for an interview. She is such a lovely young woman, and she honored me by showing me her queen items—which again, lent authenticity to my story.

Another thing I especially enjoyed, was viewing the video clips online of the MRA pageant. This helped me so much with the closing of my story. Because I write in close 3rd person point of view, in my mind, I was living Natalie's story, so at the end when she is on stage and reliving all that she's overcome that year, tears just poured from my eyes. I felt like I was there—and I hope you will too.

Any surprises you found about rodeo pageants?

Many things, actually. I was surprised at the amount of learning required for the interview portion. Good grief! How do these girls keep all that information in their heads! I am awed at the amount of expertise required to complete the horsemanship events. Riding with confidence on an animal you've never rode before takes a LOT of skill and courage, I might add. And carrying those flags, and shining those boots (and blackening the bottoms of those heels). I greatly enjoyed viewing the various leather dresses—and imagining what Natalie would wear. So fun!

Why should people in the rodeo queen industry read *Seeds of Summer* or other books from the series?

To read a story that hones in on the small details of a person's life, who goes through the same things you've gone through or are going through is interesting to anyone, I think. I pray that I've created a believable story that will take you through the highs and lows of Natalie's summer, and that will bring tears of sadness and joy to your eyes. After all, it's a story about family and love and conflict, and of ranching and horses, that's topped off with the joy of being a queen.

From your new found experience with rodeo queens, how would you encourage contestants?

Oh my, I would encourage each and every one of them to go after their dreams, and to not be detoured by difficulties thrown your way. To know that even if you don't win, your story is unique and so important to the overall scheme of life. I especially hope that Jared's sermon in *Seeds of Summer*, (which is not preachy, trust me) touches you—that each one of you can touch someone with a smile, your actions or a belief in something greater than yourself.

About the Author: Deborah Vogts and her husband have three daughters and make their home in Southeast Kansas where they raise and train American Quarter Horses. She studied English and Journalism at Emporia State University. In writing this series, she hopes to share her passion for one of the last tallgrass prairie regions in the world, showing that God's great beauty rests on the prairie and in the hearts of those who live there.

For more information about Deborah, please visit her website at <http://www.deborahvogts.com>. You may find her books at amazon.com, cbd.com or at other online bookstores as well as at all fine bookstores in the United States.

