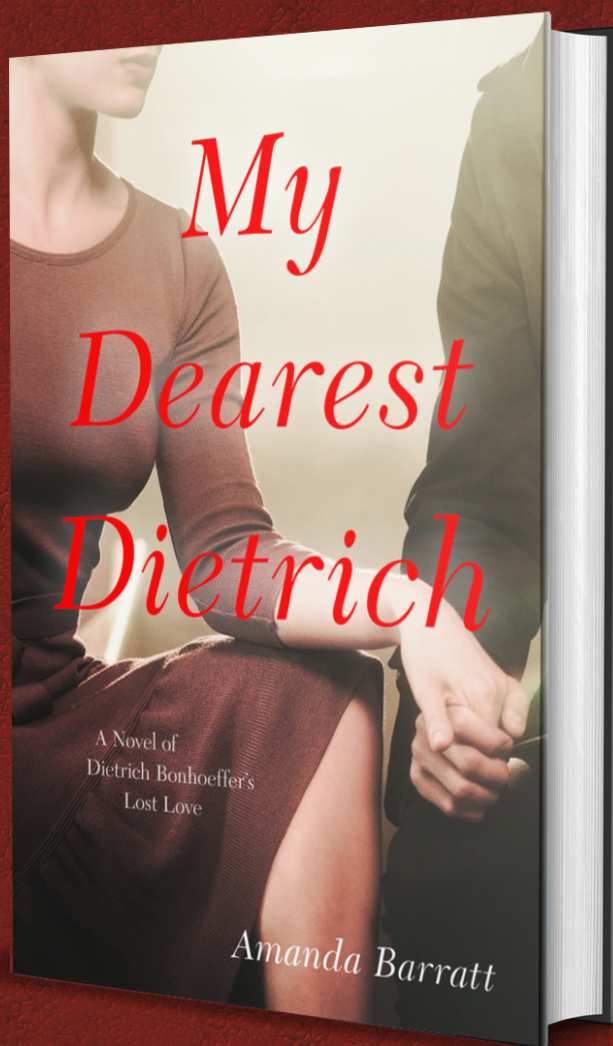


"An extraordinary story, richly researched and beautifully told."

—Laura Frantz,
Christy Award winning author of *The Lacemaker*



My Dearest Dietrich

BOOK CLUB KIT



Dear Reader,

It's such a privilege and joy to share this novel with you—*My Dearest Dietrich: A Novel of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Lost Love*. Thank you for choosing this story to read with your book group.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer is a hero of the faith whose legacy has impacted millions. But not many of us are aware that, as well as being the author of *The Cost of Discipleship* and a participant in the resistance against the Nazi regime, the final years of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life were marked by a love story with a woman every bit as multi-faceted as Bonhoeffer himself. A few years ago, when I first heard about the woman in Bonhoeffer's life, the desire to tell her story—their story—took hold of my heart.

Maria von Wedemeyer was eighteen years younger than Dietrich. That alone is enough to make it as unlikely a pairing as could be imagined for the theologian who, up until their meeting, seemed determined to remain a bachelor. In truth, Bonhoeffer had finally found a woman perfect for him. Her vivacious personality, so different from his own, both intrigued him and provided an antidote to the tension of his conspiratorial activities. But Maria too dealt with war's crushing hand, as first her father, then brother fell on the battlefields, fighting, like many German men, for a cause neither fully gave their allegiance to.

In a letter to Maria, Bonhoeffer described their relationship as “a growing seed.” I've no doubt that seed would have continued to blossom had not Bonhoeffer's discipleship exacted from him the most final of costs. Their story strikes at the deepest chords of the complexities that stand stark in love and war, and the telling of it has challenged and changed me. It's a journey, in the truest sense of the word, and I'm blessed you've decided to travel it with me.

I've prepared this guide to enhance your discussion time. It includes discussion questions, a popular (and delicious!) German recipe, and a FAQ section for you to learn a bit about me, and the journey of writing *My Dearest Dietrich*.

Though I may not be able to travel to your book group in person, I'd love to “be” there through Skype! If you would like to schedule a Q&A with me as part of your bookish get-together, you can contact me through the form on my website (www.amandabarratt.net) or via my Facebook page (www.facebook.com/amandabarrattauthor).


Happy Reading!


Amanda





MY DEAREST DIETRICH DISCUSSION GUIDE

- 1- Before reading this novel, how familiar were you with the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer? Was this your first encounter with the story of Maria von Wedemeyer? How did discovering this facet of Dietrich's life change your view of him?
 - 2- When we meet Maria in the prologue, she's traveling to Flossenbürg on foot, desperately seeking information about Dietrich's whereabouts. When we encounter her in chapter two, she's a spirited eighteen-year-old fresh out of boarding school and meeting Dietrich for the first time. Her journey is one paved with hardship and loss, but also with growth. How does Maria grow throughout the novel?
 - 3- When Dietrich visits Bishop Bell, he says "Christ calls us to suffer on behalf of others. My suffering involves putting aside qualms of conscience." Do you agree with Dietrich's decision to participate actively in the conspiracy against Hitler, though doing so means he must break fundamental biblical principles—lying, consulting in plans for murder, etc. Why or why not?
 - 4- During Maria's national service, she works as a nanny for a family who is very pro-Nazi. When she encounters their young son singing an anti-Jewish song, she muses that "when modeled for the impressionable, hate is a sword easily taken up." How do our beliefs transpose to our children and those around us? Contrast the Vogel family with the Bonhoeffers and von Wedemeyers. Has there ever been a time when you regretted influencing someone with a belief?
 - 5- After Hans shows Dietrich the Chronicle of Shame, Christel asks what Dietrich is going to do with the knowledge. In the Bonhoeffer house, "the solidity of ideas (is) based upon how far one was willing to go to carry them out." How have you found this to be true in your own life? If you were in Dietrich's position, what would you have done?
 - 6- Do you agree with Maria's mother's decision to keep Dietrich and Maria apart? Why or why not? How might the story have looked if told from Frau von Wedemeyer's point of view?
 - 7- Were you familiar with the plots to assassinate Hitler before reading this story? If so, did you learn something new? If not, were you surprised that there were so many? German historians have documented at least forty-two attempts on Hitler's life, three of which are detailed in the novel. How does that change your perception of the Holocaust?
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8- Many of the letters included in the novel are portions of actual correspondence. Did reading the real words Dietrich and Maria exchanged enhance your reading experience?

9- After Dietrich is imprisoned, his relationship with Maria is restricted to letters and monthly visits. As the months drag on, Maria begins to struggle with the enforced separation. Have you ever faced a lengthy separation from a spouse or significant other? Did you relate to Dietrich and Maria's struggle to maintain their relationship despite the physical distance between them?

10- After an air raid, Dietrich composes his most famous poem *Who Am I*. What were your thoughts on the poem? Was there a particular line or stanza that stood out to you?

11- Ursula wrestles with her decision to prevent her brother Klaus from committing suicide rather than being seized by the Gestapo. Maria tells her, "You did what you thought was right. That's the main thing." Later, after Klaus is brutally tortured, Ursula regrets her decision. How does war, or other deeply difficult experiences, alter the choices we make?

12- After the failed July 20th plot is discovered, Dietrich decides to attempt an escape from Tegel. He then rejects the plan because of possible reprisals against his family and fiancée. At this point, Dietrich knows he's surrendering himself to probable execution, and he asks God what is left to him now. Did that scene affect you? If you were in Dietrich's position, how do you think you would handle coming to such a decision?

13- What were your thoughts on the epilogue? How do you think Maria's relationship with Dietrich affected the rest of her life? What do you think her life might have looked like had Dietrich survived?

14- Finally, what scene in the novel impacted you the most? Did any of them make you cry? What was your main takeaway from the book? What will you remember most about *My Dearest Dietrich*?



Apfelkuchen

Traditional German Apple Cake



This easy and delicious German recipe makes a perfect accompaniment to a discussion of My Dearest Dietrich, along with a cup of kaffee (or tea, if you prefer!)

Ingredients

*4-5 cups baking apples
1 1/4 cups white flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
3 teaspoons sugar
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup unsalted butter
1 egg
2 tablespoons milk*

Topping

*2 tablespoons unsalted butter
1/2 cup sugar
1 1/2 tablespoons white flour
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon*

Directions

Preheat oven to 350°F. Mix 1 1/4 cup flour, baking powder, 3 tsp sugar, and salt. Cut 1/2 cup butter into dry mix with a pastry blender to pea size. In a small bowl, beat egg with 2 T milk and add to dry mix. Mix thoroughly and pat dough into a greased 9x13-inch baking dish. Peel and core apples. Cut into thin wedge slices and place on dough in rows until covered. Try to cover the thin end of one apple with the thick end of the other. Dot apples with 2 T butter and mix 1/2 cup sugar, 1 1/2 Tbs flour and cinnamon together. Spread dry topping over dotted apples, and bake in oven for 30-45 minutes, until golden brown.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

I hope you enjoy this behind-the-scenes peek into the writing of *My Dearest Dietrich*! I recommend reading the answers after you've finished the novel, since there are spoilers.

What was the inspiration behind *My Dearest Dietrich*?


They say every story has a seed. The seed for *My Dearest Dietrich* emerged when I heard the story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer for the first time. I'm from a very literary family and our dinner conversations often revolve around the books we're reading. After my mom read Eric Metaxas's *Seven Men: And the Secret of Their Greatness*, she shared the story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer with us. But I wasn't inspired to write about him until I came across a quote from *Love Letters from Cell 92*, which is a compilation of the letters Bonhoeffer exchanged with his fiancée during their engagement. When I read the quote, the dots connected in my mind. "Wait. Dietrich Bonhoeffer had a fiancée?" The minute I began reading about Maria von Wedemeyer, I knew theirs was a story begging to be told.


What was your favorite part of writing *My Dearest Dietrich*?

Discovering who Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Maria von Wedemeyer were at their deepest level. Reaching beyond the surface history found in a Wikipedia article, and reading the letters they wrote to each other, the letters Bonhoeffer wrote to family and friends, his books and sermons, and excerpts from Maria's diary. All of this, combined with delving into what it was like to live in Nazi Germany through memoirs and historical texts, provided the backbone for the novel. I felt a bit like a detective, and always got a thrill out of discovering something new—an interview Maria did in 1974 for Malcolm Muggeridge's television documentary *A Third Testament*, interviews with Bonhoeffer's niece and sister in the online archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, an article written in German that I could read the gist of using Google Translate. It was definitely the most intense project I've ever undertaken, but also the most rewarding.

What was the hardest part of writing *My Dearest Dietrich*?

Sifting through fact and conjuncture to get to the heart of who Dietrich and Maria were. Bonhoeffer is someone a wide range of people have a wide range of opinions about, and I felt a great responsibility to portray their lives and their love story as truthfully as I could. Sometimes it felt like picking through a massive pile of sand to extract the diamonds. Also, making sure the novel was both historically accurate and fictionally compelling. I was dealing with a large cast of players I wanted to incorporate, and since I didn't want readers to get so lost remembering them all that they forgot the purpose of the story, I ended up cutting two of Dietrich's siblings from the novel—his oldest brother and youngest sister. I also added






fictional characters, such as the family Maria served during her term of national service, and Oskar von Scheffler. Both are based on real individuals, but the circumstances surrounding them in the novel are purely of my own invention. In the end, I came to terms with the fact that although I was writing a story heavily based on fact, it was also fiction, and would thus be imperfect, despite the hours I poured into researching. Ultimately, I wanted to pay tribute to this incredible couple, the sacrifices they made during a tumultuous time in history, and the lessons their story can teach us today.

What scene was your favorite and which one was the hardest to write?

One of my favorite scenes was actually the first one I wrote, which ended up being the prologue, where Maria is walking to Flossenbürg. Beginnings are sometimes difficult for me, as I'm not yet into the flow of the story and characters, but this one just poured out of me (for lack of a better phrase). Immediately after finishing, I wanted to know more, to discover how they came to that place. As far as the hardest? Some of the interrogation scenes were difficult to write, as there are no actual transcripts, and a good deal of what Bonhoeffer did for the resistance is still shrouded in some secrecy. By far, the final two scenes were the hardest to write emotionally. I shed more tears writing this novel than I have with any other project. Coming to the end of their final scene together in Tegel, and knowing Dietrich and Maria's dream of a future together would never be fulfilled, deeply affected me. As an author, I experience the emotions alongside my characters. I still can't read those final two scenes without tearing up!

What do you hope readers take away from the novel?

The ways stories impact the heart are as varied as the individuals who read them. So I'm not sure I can pinpoint one exact message. What I will say is, writing this book and discovering the stories of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Maria von Wedemeyer changed me both as an author and as a person more than any project I've written to date. The questions Bonhoeffer and those in World War II Germany faced, are questions we as Christians face today, albeit on a different level. The church is called to take a Christ-honoring stand on political and cultural issues, and to accept the personal consequences that may come with that stand. Bonhoeffer spoke out against the persecution of the Jews and published a book on the Psalms during a time when the leaders of Nazi Germany wanted to erase the Old Testament from the Bible. He illegally trained seminary students in the truth of Scripture until he was shut down by the Gestapo. Later, Bonhoeffer took an active role in the conspiracy against Adolf Hitler. And Maria, despite having lost a father and brother on the battlefield, took the risk of becoming engaged to Dietrich, though she was aware of his involvement in activities that could (and eventually did) lead to his arrest. As it says in James, faith without works is dead. Both Bonhoeffer and Maria lived out their faith through action during a time when many so-called Christians turned aside and did nothing. Their radical discipleship both challenged and convicted me.





ECPA best-selling author Amanda Barratt fell in love with writing in grade school when she wrote her first story—a spinoff of *Jane Eyre*. Now, Amanda writes romantic, historical fiction, penning stories of beauty and brokenness set against the backdrop of bygone eras not so very different from our own. Her novel *My Dearest Dietrich: A Novel of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Lost Love*, released from Kregel Publications in June 2019.

She's also the author of *My Heart Belongs in Niagara Falls, New York: Adele's Journey*, as well as several novellas with Barbour Publishing. Two of her novellas have been finalists in the FHL Reader's Choice Awards.

Amanda lives in the woods of Michigan with her fabulous family, where she can be found reading way too many books, plotting her next novel, and jotting down imaginary travel itineraries for her dream vacation to Europe.

Connect with her on Facebook and visit her online at amandabarratt.net.