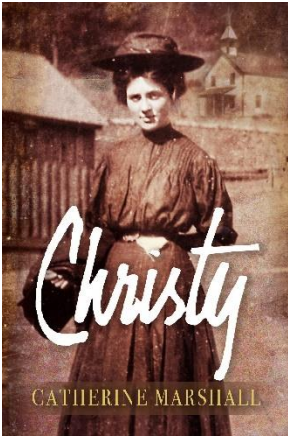


## An interview with Nancy LeSourd, Publisher of Gilead Publishing's Evergreen Farm imprint about Catherine Marshall's *Christy*



Some stories are evergreen, their themes and lessons standing the test of time and connecting with readers generation after generation. One such book is Catherine Marshall's *Christy*, originally released in 1967 and now celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary with the release of a new hardcover edition and its first-ever release as an e-book from Evergreen Farm, an imprint of Gilead Publishing. Based on Marshall's mother's life, the story of *Christy* is one of determination, devotion and commitment to making a difference in the world.

Marshall's best seller tells the story of nineteen-year-old teacher Christy Huddleston who moves from her home in Asheville, North Carolina, in 1912 and finds herself in Cutter Gap, a Smoky Mountain community that feels suspended in time, trapped by poverty, superstitions and century-old traditions. Christy struggles to find acceptance in her new home, and some of the Cutter Gap residents see her — and her one-room school — as a threat to their way of life. Her faith is challenged by trial and tragedy, and her heart is torn between two strong men with conflicting views about how to care for the families of the Cove.

**Q: How many copies of *Christy* have been sold in the last 50 years since its original release?**

Exact figures are hard to estimate as the way sales are tracked has changed throughout the years. The book has also been re-released in various formats from different publishers. However, with the information we do have, we believe more than 10 million copies have been sold.

**Q: Why do you think *Christy* resonated with so many people at the time it was written? What makes this story as culturally relevant today as it was when it was first written?**

*Christy* was first released in 1967, a turbulent time in our nation's history. Americans were politically at odds with one another, and protest, frustration, anger and violence in the streets of America were at new heights. The civil rights movement faced tensions as the Black Power movement challenged the Martin Luther King non-violent protest approach. The number of young people drafted to fight in the Vietnam war brought the reality of death to many families. Drugs were rampant.

The story of *Christy*, though set 50 years earlier, was not so different from the time in which the novel was first published or today. The Mission represented the desire of outsiders to live alongside the mountain people and provide education and guidance. In reality, it was an attempt to create social change. The centuries-old "mountain ways" were threatened by the Mission school and its "newfangled" ideas. Christy's desire to educate her students, challenge superstitions, and to open up opportunities for them outside of the Cove threatened the fabric of the lives of these isolated people and even the cohesion of their community. Evil existed in the excesses of alcohol and the problems of an economy heavily dependent on the sale of the moonshine. Feuding caused deaths that seemed senseless and tore families apart.

Now we are nearly in the 2020s, and *Christy* is just as relevant today as ever before. Wherever there are young people who are passionate about impacting others, changing society's social problems or caring for those who are impoverished or uneducated, there is *Christy*.

**Q: Readers throughout time have always had a strong emotional connection to *Christy*. What is it about *Christy* that resonates with young women especially?**

The story of *Christy* has endured because of its timeless themes. A young person, barely 19, is inspired to contribute her time and talents to make a difference. Her idealistic ideas clash head-on with those who see her as an outsider, a do-gooder and a meddler. Christy has to learn how to come alongside people she wants to "help" and learn how to care — really care — for them, one person at a time.

Throughout the years, we have learned of many people inspired by the story of Christy who became a teacher or a doctor or who entered public service living among the poor in their communities in the United States or abroad.

**Q: Are there special features in the new edition for both those who have read and loved Christy many years ago and younger generations who aren't familiar with the book?**

Actually, there are no commemorative features. In this new edition we went back to the original model, creating a book that can be easily read by millions of new readers. Our intention was to create a book to be read, not placed in a shelf as a keepsake. In addition to this new hardcover addition, the book is available in digital format for the first time. We're so excited to be able to reach new readers with the e-book.

**Q: In what ways will millennials be able to relate to Christy, a character based on a woman who was born 120 years ago?**

There is an entire generation who does not remember the CBS TV series. I gathered our children to watch it every week, but they were two and four when it aired. Today they are 25 and 27. The largest demographic by 2020 will be the millennials. Their choices, passions, investments of time, talent and treasure will impact America economically, politically and socially.

I am particularly excited to introduce this audience to the novel *Christy*. *Christy* is a timeless tale of courage, determination and passion — a story very much reflective of millennials today. With their desire to make a difference, ingenuity to create businesses or engage in work that has social impact and rejection of cash donations in favor of offering their time and talents or social enterprise, it is time to introduce them to this amazing young woman, Christy. Christy and other key characters in the novel, such as the doctor and a minister, have to learn how to take who they are and what they have to give and learn to serve a community that challenges them in ways they cannot anticipate.

How these key characters approach trying to make a difference — all very unique and different — are everyman and everywoman who desires to do the same in their own community today. The wonderful thing about millennials is that they are disrupters; they want to make a difference. The desire to be a change agent often starts in the heart, as did Christy's desire to come to the mountains to teach children. That inspirational motivation can sometimes flag when met with obstacles, resistance or even hatred. The story of Christy takes on these challenges head-on and does not flinch with depicting the realities of pitting the enthusiastic change agent Christy against resistant, suspicious people in the community. How she navigates her life in the Cove and her passion to make a difference applies to anyone who wants to make a difference in his or her community, business, charity or social enterprise.

**Q: How has Christy shaped Christian fiction and the Christian publishing industry as a whole?**

*Christy* was a trailblazer. When it was released in 1967, there really wasn't much of a "Christian fiction" genre. The book's acclaim and success was an inspiration to a new wave of authors who went on to become the foundation of Christian fiction. When this category of writing achieved enough momentum to require its own set of awards in 1999, it was only fitting to name The Christy Awards after Catherine Marshall's pioneer novel that set the bar so high.

Many of the greatest Christian fiction stories throughout the years also take a page from the character of Christy Huddleston herself. One of the reasons she is so relatable is that she struggles, falters and doubts. For most of us, our first true exposure to the darkness and brokenness of the world rocks our worldview, and Christy is no different. Catherine Marshall wanted to emphasize that it's OK — even appropriate — to be filled with questions in the face of tragedy and evil. Christy has good intentions, but she's definitely not a super-Christian. It's the influence of this character, one whose relatability transcends generation or geography, that continues to help shape the genre.

**Q: What would Catherine Marshall think of the book being so popular that it became a beloved TV series?**

Because *Christy* was on the *New York Times* best-sellers list for 38 weeks, there was a heated bidding war for the movie rights. MGM purchased the movie rights to *Christy* shortly after it became a blockbuster success. In 1969,

the movie was in pre-production. A well-known director and award-winning scriptwriter were engaged by the studio. The script was written, and just like she did with the popular movie, *A Man Called Peter*, Catherine consulted with the studio. Then MGM was sold, and every picture in production was canceled. As you can imagine, it was a deep disappointment to Catherine. The *Christy* film rights, which had been sold to MGM, were locked up for decades and held hostage by the studio that had no plans to do anything with the rights or the script now relegated to the basement files. This story, perfect for dramatization, was owned by a studio with no desire to bring it to life.

The CBS TV series resurrected the dream of *Christy* on-screen again — this time on television. Although Catherine was not alive to enjoy those episodes, her family was thrilled with Kellie Martin's portrayal of Christy. We believe Catherine would have agreed and been delighted to see the character of Christy come alive visually and dramatically. Many of the episodes were drawn directly from the novel. A number of the endearing school children in the series were local to the area, and some had never acted before. The portrayal of Christy, Dr. MacNeill and Miss Alice by experienced actors who were ideal for their parts brought the novel's characters to life.

Catherine would have appreciated the authenticity brought to the series by the producers. She was a stickler for historic research both in *Christy* and her next novel, *Julie*. She believed the historic detail and the use of it in her vivid descriptions, plotting and characterizations transported the reader back in time to the community and brought them alongside Christy in "real time" as she was experiencing the Cove. The authenticity of the location in which the series was filmed, the depiction of the Mission buildings, the detail in recreating this Scottish highlander mountain community and the care of the writers and the producers to bring the novel to life made the series a success.

Now, what about Christy's dramatic big screen or television future? There is nothing in the works right now. It was always Catherine's hope that one day Christy would be a film musical. We can dream.

### **Q: What lessons can those who are about to make a life change and enter an unfamiliar world glean from the story of Christy?**

In a word, **courage**. It took a lot of courage for Christy Huddleston to leave everything familiar and comfortable and enter a world different from anything she had experienced before. Her life in the Appalachian Tennessee mountains was a stark contrast to the life she had lived in the city of Asheville, North Carolina. It required courage for her to face opposition and evil. It required courage for her to face her own shortcomings and doubts without running away. She continued to try new methods and ideas.

**Perseverance** is another lesson. Christy learned that change of social injustice and community values is slow and often painful. Changing a community and its way of doing things is usually the result of impacting one life at a time. Learning how to persevere in the midst of discouragement and setbacks is another life lesson demonstrated in Christy's encounters with the fiercely determined Scottish highlanders in the mountains of Tennessee.

**Unexpected joy** — it is often when we risk the familiar, launch out into the uncertain future and leave behind what is comfortable and familiar that we encounter unexpected joy. Christy had no idea when she first arrived in the Cove that she would experience unfettered joy with these ragamuffin children, encounter the depths of shared friendship and insights with an unusual mentor or be taught about true beauty and joy in the simplest of things by a mountain woman. She came as the teacher. She came to serve. She came to make a difference. As so often happens when we take these kinds of risks, she found herself the recipient of so much more.

**Learn more about the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Christy* plus download a free map of Cutter Gap by visiting [www.christybook.com](http://www.christybook.com). Readers can also keep up with news on future Evergreen Farm releases via [Facebook \(@gileadpublishing\)](#) and [Twitter \(@GileadPub\)](#).**