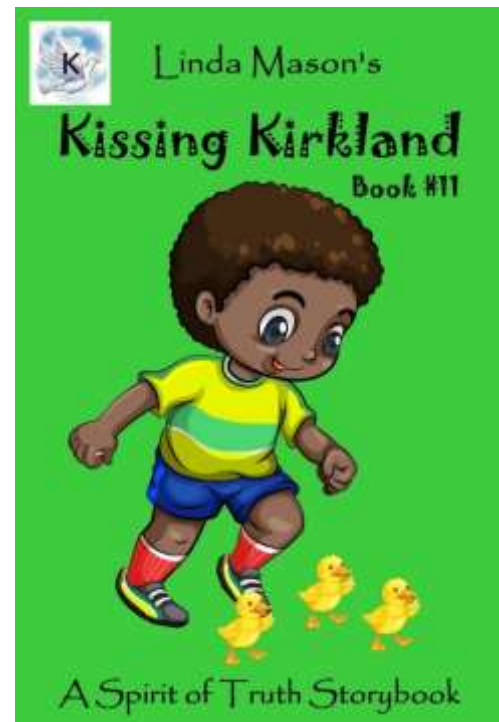


Getting Down to the Nitty-Gritty: By L Mason

Both excited and uncomfortable, I decided on a publisher for my entire Spirit of Truth series. I had offers from other publishing companies that wanted my books, however most of them required that I pay from \$3,000 to \$5,000 per book, which is money I absolutely didn't have at the time and this news was very discouraging. Several of these companies offered extensive universal marketing for a two year period and guaranteed that I would sell at least 5,000 of each book, affording me the designation as a "Best Selling Author" (which one obtains by selling 5,000 copies of any one book). I had my original 26 books to publish along with the 26 books to be published in Spanish (52 books in total). Even in the best case scenario, I would have needed to come up with \$160,000. Even with their guarantee to generate nearly \$500,000 in profits, I didn't have a quarter of a million dollars to take advantage of that offer.

The publisher I went with was willing to take me on for less than \$500 a book, which included a bit of advertising, but really no guarantees of sales or marketing assistance. At this rate, I could pay for it one book at a time, which made my dream of publishing my book series a palatable reality. I felt I had no choice but to take this route and believe God to give me creative ideas to saturate the market another way, but perhaps further down the road.

Before embarking on the quest to publish my storybook series, the owner of the company worked with me to publish another series I wrote, *Appetizers from the Word of God. Are You Hungry?* He did an



excellent job with publishing the series and offered great suggestions all along the way at a very minimal cost. The books were beautiful. I was so impressed with the level of personal attention given to me and his expertise throughout that process, that I was delighted to have him produce my children's storybook series as well.

After completing the "Appetizers" series, I prepared the first SOT storybook to send to my publisher. At the time, I was without an illustrator and my publisher persuaded me that he could use clip art to complete the first book to be published, *Kissing Kirkland*. Using illustrators from the publishing company would have been way out of my budget, as the quotes were around \$50 - \$600 per picture, depending on how much detail went into each picture. Alternately, he sent me some samples of what he could do using clip art instead and I was very impressed, so I gave him the go-a-head. I continued to search for an affordable illustrator, however, because I knew that some of my books would require some very specific illustrations, and I wanted to be able to customize the imagery, so clip art was not a long term solution. At the time, I was working as a custodian in a high school, making just above minimum wage. If I had to spend up to \$600 per picture, I was never going to be able to finish my series. I knew I was going to have to depend on the Lord to make a way.

Having the first book of my children's series officially in print, my publisher set up my first book signing. It was at that signing that I met my current illustrator; an incredible teenager who just so happened to attended the very high school in which I worked! Jessica was sitting with one of her best friends who was also a new author. I saw Jessica's art work in her friend's book and was amazed. Her work was stunning and very beautiful. I knew I had to ask her if she was willing to work with me as an illustrator.

It turned out that not only was Jessica affordable, but she was brilliant, very talented, and committed to work at my financial pace

until completion. “My pace” has turned out to be over three years now and is still ongoing. With her parents’ consent and as long as this venture did not interfere with her school work, we worked out a contract. Now, my storybooks also showcase her illustrations and amazing talent. My books took on a whole new life.

Fast forward a few years, and Jessica is now in her second year of nursing school and I am fully retired at home. We are still working to complete the illustrations for the remaining titles and her work continues to impress and improve. By the end of this year, she will have completed twenty out of twenty-six storybooks, even though it will take me another year or so to fund their publishing. I had often wondered why I’d accepted a janitorial position in a school after having worked in insurance and early childhood education for so many years. I now know that it was to meet Jessica, my illustrator, who would help complete an important segment of this journey.

Sometimes when you feel like you are “out of place” in your walk in life, step back and ask yourself where are you supposed to be headed? Who around you is assigned to assist you on that journey? Perhaps you are supposed to assist them as well. Can you imagine the experience my illustrator is getting by completing 26 different storybooks? Can you imagine what an awesome portfolio she’s developing by working with me on this project - the first of its kind for her? It’s a two way blessing I’m so glad I didn’t miss out on, and so far, Jessica is pleased too. She’s well aware that she has incredible talent and could realistically request a lot more money for her illustrations, but she has committed to me and my goals and I appreciate her for it daily.