

Great stories for a cold, lazy afternoon

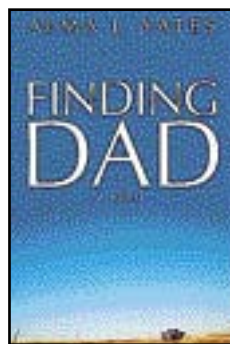
I'VE BEEN traveling this week and on the way out the door I grabbed two books. By sheer luck, they both turned out to be good books to travel with — engrossing story lines, believable characters and honest-to-goodness issues that many of us have or will deal with at some time in our lives.

The situations deal with trust, rejection and picking up the pieces to start again. Both are well-written and “Finding Dad” will tug at the heart-strings and the tear ducts, and if not laugh-out-loud funny, at least brings some smiles along the way. Both books include characters who are members of the LDS Church, but neither of them are churchy — just good, clean stories that will entertain.

“Finding Dad” by Alma J. Yates (Covenant Communications Inc., 2008, \$15.95)

This book has been in the stores for a while, so if you have seen it and wondered whether to buy or check it out, the answer is a resounding “Yes!” This is Yates’ fourth novel, and the first time I remember actually reading his work. He is one heck of a good writer. Once I started reading, I couldn’t put it down except to eat and sleep (one of the perks of being on vacation!).

Porter Huggins was a high school phenomenon — star athlete, ladies’ man and the whole ball of wax. Much later in life, he also realizes he has been selfish and shallow. Shallow enough to leave his wife and son for another woman when the boy, Alma, is 6 years old. Visits with Alma have been few and far between, so when he returns to Panguitch, Utah, to collect his 16-year-old son after his ex-wife’s untimely death in a car accident, not only the boy but the whole town has a score to settle with him. Feeling guilty



but unjustly picked on, Porter arrives in town defensive and hoping to avoid the unpleasantness of previous visits.

When he stops by to see one of his best high school buddies, he is surprised that even he holds deep resentments against Porter. But the visit does clue Porter into information he needs: “There is one thing you should know. Last November ... his grandpa gave him that old ’71 Ford truck. ... It’s mainly a pile of junk, but Alma had always wanted it. He wants to fix it up. He wants to have it ready to show off to Grandpa Henrie when he comes back from Nigeria next May.” Porter protests that he has neither time nor interest in hauling an old truck back to Arizona — and even less desire to have it parked in his driveway. However, Alma tells him flat out that where he goes, the truck goes too. Still thinking he’ll convince Alma that a new truck is the best option, he grudgingly concedes.

Father and son immediately realize their lifestyles don’t mesh, and Alma especially holds a long-standing grudge against Porter for leaving and asks him some pretty painful and pointed questions that make him squirm. He has been on the path to putting his life back on the right track and doesn’t appreciate having to explain the past. Part of his new life includes a woman, 10 years younger than he, whom he has become quite fond of. The very

Regional Reads

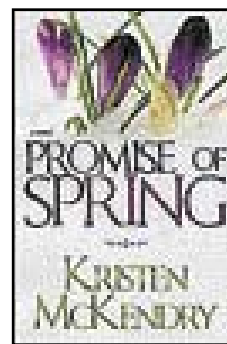
By Charlene Hirschi



first night in Arizona, Alma and Darby meet when Porter is gone, and although Darby and Alma bond immediately, Alma tells her more about his dad’s background and states emphatically that he never wants a stepmom. These revelations lead to Darby telling Porter that their relationship — in its budding stages — is off. They can be good neighbors, but that’s all.

Darby and the old truck are instrumental in finally bringing father and son closer, until the end of the summer when Porter gives Alma his freedom to return to Panguitch. Alma is thrilled, but Porter feels life will never be the same again: “Porter sat in the living room with a book on his lap, but he wasn’t reading it” when Darby shows up and admits, “I’ll miss him. He was positively bubbling when I showed up this evening and he told me the news. I love to see him so excited. But I just hate to see him go.”

The title made me think the book was about the son finding his dad, but it’s deeper than that. It’s also about Porter finding the dad within himself. As Alma prepares to leave, Porter realizes “there had been a time when he’d been con-



tent to stay alone in the house without worrying about anybody else. In fact, there was a time when he’d enjoyed his self-imposed solitude. At first it had been an adjustment having Alma around, even though Alma was independent and far from being a burden. But Porter knew instinctively that his house would be a lonely place when Alma left.”

The book holds some surprises at the very end. Women should be prepared with a tissue box in easy reach.

“Promise of Spring” by Kristen McKendry (Covenant Communications Inc., 2008, \$14.95)

McKendry is a Utah native who now lives in Canada. As far as I can tell, this is a first novel for her, and she really starts off her publication debut with a bang. I’m looking forward to more of her clean writing style and innovative stories.

Melinda has been through a devastating divorce after only a year of marriage, and she has moved from New Mexico to Texas to start a new life — sans interference from her family and to prove to herself she can be independent. The independent kick comes mainly from accusations from her former husband that she is a clinger and unable to survive on her own. She buys a farm and after a year is experiencing success in her attempts to “live completely off the land and keep other people at a distance.”

Enter widower Ryan Delaney and his young son, Tanner. Melinda isn’t totally surprised that she and the handsome Ryan hit it off, but she does resist: “Melinda spent a restless night mashing her hot pillow and hopelessly tangling her hair. Every time she began to drift toward sleep, the memory of Ryan’s touch would bring her eyes popping open again. She told herself she was being foolish. She did not want another relationship. Hadn’t she learned her lesson the first time around? Two years had dulled the raw pain of her divorce, but it was still there, nagging like a bad toothache.” Besides, she doesn’t want to give up her hard-earned independence — does she?

More complications arise as she finds herself even more drawn to Tanner. Never thinking of herself as one who wants children, she finds herself completely won over by the angelic toddler. Before the Delanys’ arrival, there had been some minor vandalism on Melinda’s farm, but suddenly there is a rash of more serious vandalism that ends with Ryan’s new breeding barn burning to the ground. Puzzled but suspicious of two neighbors — one a friend and the other a teenager with a reputation as a troublemaker — fear and suspicion rule as they try to discover who is behind the arson. There are no big surprises at the end, but the book is a pleasant read and just perfect for a lazy winter afternoon’s reading.

Book critic Charlene Hirschi holds her master’s in English from Utah State University. She is among a number of freelance writers whose columns appear in The Herald Journal. Authors, readers and editors can e-mail charlenehirschi@yahoo.com about books they would like reviewed, or visit www.charlenehirschi.com.