

# 'Water, Stone' a thoughtful, literary book

**A**FTER A MONTH of vacation from Regional Reads and some much needed R&R, I return refreshed and ready to go, but it has put me even further behind as the slush pile grows even higher.

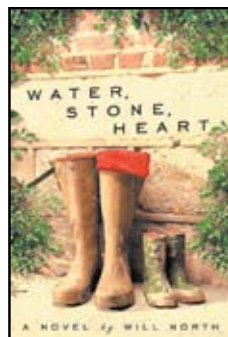
I'm seeing more and more first-time authors and the number and quality of first-time books is remarkable. First timers: It's even more important in this market to make sure your writing is polished before you send it to a publisher; don't give up even after several rejections. If you are lucky enough to get feedback, pay attention and do what the publisher suggests.

In order to give space to new authors, at the end of this and future columns you will find a short synopsis of two books by authors who have been reviewed in this column many times — tried and true authors who already have a following and whose fans will be happy to know they have a new book out. Josi Kilpack and H.B. (Heather) Moore have been profiled in this column and are both favorites of mine, so I can confidently recommend their books without hesitation from past experience.

## "Water, Stone, Heart" by Will North (Shaye Arheart Books, 2009, \$24)

It's interesting why we choose to spend our precious leisure time with a particular author. It might be the cover — and this is a good one — it might be because somebody recommended the book, or perhaps it's for the reasons I first noticed this author: His bio intrigued me. "He divides his time between Seattle, Wash. (regional writer), and Great Britain." That seemed like an interesting combination to me, and it turns out it was. In addition, this is his second published book, but he has "been a ghost writer of more than a half-dozen nonfiction books" and this is the second novel under his own name. I hope you enjoy "Water, Stone, Heart" as much as I did.

In many ways this is a thoughtful, literary book. The charac-



terization is subtle and sparsely drawn but solid and thoughtful as the stone hedges Andrew Stratton has come to learn how to build. The people who populate the pages of this book are as recognizable as the folks next door, even though they are playing out their particular slice of life in Boscastle, England, a small, picturesque village where Andrew has come to escape from the pain and memory of a recent divorce, the infidelity of his wife and the unhappy suggestion that the fault was his because he is stoic, uninteresting and predictable. He finds solace and healing in the "landscape of dizzying cliffs, jagged coastline, lush valleys, and hills lined with stone hedges." A welcome, irresistible and soothing change from his life as a university professor in Philadelphia.

Picking up on his ex-wife's accusations, Andrew wonders if she is right about his dull life, and perhaps he's even a fraud. He teaches and writes about architecture theory, but has never built or designed a real building. Seeking to find the real Andrew, he has come to Boscastle to take a hands-on class in stone hedge building. He finds the grueling work of setting stones gratifying and he soon learns he has a talent for "feeling" the stone and its proper placement. In this blue-collar activity, he finds a satisfaction and pride of accomplishment he never felt in the classroom.

Several people soon become important in his life, two of them being women: love interest Nicola Rhys-Jones, witch or bewitching, he's not sure; and 9-year-old Lee, who is much too wise and

## Regional Reads

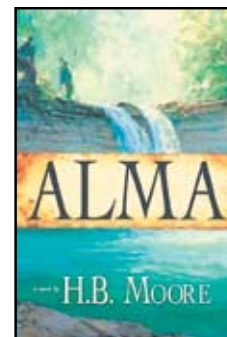
By Charlene Hirschi



independent for her years.

Nicola (aka Nicki) has come to Boscastle for much the same reason as Andrew: to escape a bad marriage and rediscover herself in this quiet village and her painting. Complicated and not sure she is willing to trust her heart to a man who will only be around for a short time, she flirts outrageously with Andrew and at the same time keeps him at arm's length, which makes her even more appealing to him. Their first encounter foreshadows what is to come between the two of them: Nicki comes upon Andrew on "a narrow grassy ledge above the sea, which he shared with a loudly bleating, black-faced sheep." With some chagrin he tells Nicki, who has just happened by and wonders what he's doing, "I was just walking along and saw this sheep stranded down here. ... I thought I'd try to help it back up to the top. But whenever I get near it, it looks as if it's going to jump.' ... the two-hundred or so feet straight down to the Atlantic breakers crashing far below."

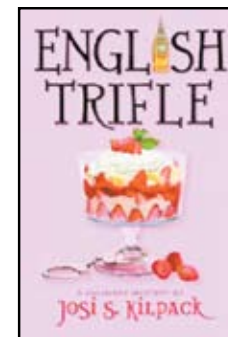
Nicki soon leaves him to his futile undertaking after telling him: "'That's Darwin's sheep, that is ... what you have there is the dimmest sheep in the flock, the one that has to die to protect the gene pool and assure the survival of the species.'" Andrew Stratton — professor from Phila-



delphia — did not know a great deal about sheep. He hadn't a clue, now that he was down here, how he would get the sheep back up. Come to think of it, he wasn't at all sure how he'd get himself back up, either." Andrew soon finds himself attracted — even more, something he hadn't felt in months: desire. He finds Nicki's flirty banter vaguely dangerous, but magnetic in a way he can't seem to resist.

Lilly Trelissick (aka Lee) adopts Andrew (Drew) and quickly becomes purveyor of local lore and history, tour guide and matchmaker after he rents a 17th-century stone cottage from her parents. She charges a small fee for her tours — an ice cream bar — and plays a pivotal role in bringing Nicki and Drew together. Her feisty presence throughout the novel provides color and comic relief. Though smitten with Drew, she is disdainful of "tourists" in general, who disrupt the pastoral rhythm of life. "I can't wait for them to leave! ... And anyway, just look at them," she sputtered as another tour bus stopped to disgorge a stream of travelers who then waddled off downhill like so many over-nourished ducks. 'Bet you none of them makes it to the top of Penally; they're all too fat!' 'I dunno, Lee; keep eating those ice creams and you could end up the same way,' Andrew said calmly. The girl lifted an eyebrow. 'You want the tour or not, Drew?'"

Set in a real village on the Atlantic coast of Cornwall, each chapter begins with a quote from official reports from rescue and weather agencies. Pay close attention to the first one — it is the clue to the act



of nature that will be the culminating adventure and defining moment for the characters, including a daring rescue of Lee and the near destruction of their beloved Boscastle.

## "Alma" by H.B. Moore (Covenant Communications Inc., September 2009)

Early reviews of "Alma," the second book in Moore's Mormon Prophets series that will be released some time this month, are stellar and indicate that Moore has once again produced a must-read book. Always well-researched and well-written, Moore, who claims to not be a Mormon scholar, seems to belie her own words as she once again captures the spirit of a major Book of Mormon prophet while remaining true to the history and intent of the original account.

## "English Truffle: A Culinary Mystery" by Josi S. Kilpack (Deseret Book, 2009, \$17.95)

Hot off the press, Kilpack brings us another rollicking good read featuring neophyte sleuth — hmm, perhaps busybody — Sadie Hoffmiller. This adventure finds Sadie and daughter Breanna in England. Armed with her recipes and an inquisitiveness that can only lead her into trouble, she sets out to solve the murder of a body she discovers in the sitting room of her daughter's boyfriend's family home. Written solely for entertainment, be prepared to enjoy both the tale and the recipes that always accompany this series.

Authors, readers and editors are invited to visit [www.charlenehirschi.com](http://www.charlenehirschi.com).