

# 'Undaunted' a real winner for everyone

**"The Undaunted: The Miracle of the Hole-in-the-Rock Pioneers" by Gerald N. Lund (Deseret Book, 2009, \$34.95)**

**L**ONG BEFORE THE best-selling "Work and the Glory" series, I was a big fan of Gerald Lund — and I still am. "Alliance," published in 1983 by Shadow Mountain, is a science-fiction book about the sinister side of a utopian society. After all these years, it is still one of the most memorable books I have ever read.

His latest book, "The Undaunted," is one of those rare books where there is something for every reader.

Although Lund provides a disclaimer that he is not a professional historian, history buffs nonetheless are going to enjoy this book for his attention to detail and the footnotes that elaborate on the details and interpretation of this event; women are going to adore it for the fictional characters and love story; men are going to like it for the detailed description of the Hole-in-the-Wall adventure and technical detail; children and teens are going to love the story of young kids involved in a true historical event; and finally, Christians are going to find the story and spiritual nature of the book uplifting and faith-promoting.

My one caveat: December is not a good time to read this book. More than 800 pages long and a story that makes it hard to put the book down, you need to set aside a not-so-busy week to read it.

Here is a brief historical summary for those who are not familiar with the Hole-in-the-Wall expedition: In 1878 a group of men, women and children (families) were called to settle the San Juan valley. These

people left comfortable homes, businesses, friends and family to accept what they considered a call from the Lord. They believed in their mission, and although future generations may consider their task foolhardy and ill-advised, Lund quotes historian David McCullough as follows: "The truth of history is the objective always. But the truth isn't just the facts. You can have all the facts imaginable and miss the truth, just as you can have facts missing or some wrong, and reach the larger truth." Lund adds, "We speak of 'Monday morning quarterbacks' or 'armchair coaches' who are quick to criticize and second-

guess what should have happened from the sidelines of the game. We must be careful that we do not make the same mistake here. This turned out to be a very complicated situation with unattractive choices or, in other cases, no other options."

As Lund gives voice to fictional characters, we can get at the truth of this often-criticized bit of history. As he adds details from personal journals and histories, he gives voice to real people whose story needs to be told. This expedition was probably one of the most dangerous ever undertaken. As we read about their hardships and the impossible task of taking wagons, herds, horses and people on horseback down steep cliffs (think Grand Canyon), you will be amazed at the faith, sheer grit and determination of these people.

There are many ways to organize a book and Lund has chosen to divide "Undaunted" into eight books, which in many ways makes it easier to read because it gives the reader a reasonable stopping place between reads without interfering with the flow and enjoy-

## Regional Reads

By Charlene Hirschi



ment of the story. The story starts in the coal mines of England where David Dickenson, against his mother's wishes, joins his father at the age of 6. The coal mine experience alone is an education for those of us who know little about working miles and miles below the ground, digging out the black fuel that made mine owners rich, heated homes and gave black lung disease to the poor.

Mrs. Dickenson's one dream is to go to America so her son can have a better life. Unfortunately, she dies before that dream can be realized, but circumstances do bring David and John to Utah — joining the Mormon church because the Mormons were the only ones who had room on their ships and the two needed to leave England any way they could in order to avoid those who wanted to give them their "comeuppance." While John embraces the new religion, David is skeptical because his experience with prayer has always confirmed what his mother told him before she died: God exists for the rich, but he neither answers prayers nor cares about those who are poor.

Arriving in Cedar City, Utah, David meets the McKenna family and quickly becomes part of their family, with a special

attraction to their daughter, Molly, that she returns. But David's lack of faith, or his belief in an "abstract" God, causes a serious rift between them. When Molly breaks it off with David, he rebelliously joins the Hole-in-the-Wall expedition in an effort to run from his troubles, even though he personally thinks the whole idea is preposterous and makes his feelings known to one and all.

From this point on, Lund weaves the fictional characters and actual participants into a story that does everything a good historical novel is supposed to do: enlighten and entertain. Headstrong, but reliable and honorable, David; beautiful, sweet and lovable Molly; her older, prickly and outspoken sister, Abby; and David's charming Yorkshire father, John, fit as smoothly into this story as if they had actually lived it.

At the same time, the true-life people who inhabit this novel are as charming, interesting and ingenious as any fictional character ever invented. Especially endearing is Jen Nielson,

a survivor of the Willie Handcart Company, whose wit and Danish accent add a dash of humor. Jen's feet were severely frostbitten and he continues to walk with a limp. When he could go no further on the handcart trek because of the frostbite, his

petite but determined wife "put him in a handcart and pulled him the rest of the way to Salt Lake City." David is particularly outraged when Nielsen is not only called to join the Hole-in-the-Wall expedition; he actually accepts the call: "seems like if they survived that experience, they'd be left alone now," he grumbles.

But go he does and David learns to love the old man and

his insights into faith and obedience. One of the most charming things about the book is Lund's ear for language. The story is greatly enhanced by John's Yorkshire accent and Nielsen's Danish attempts at English. A couple of examples: When men are arguing about whether or not it is possible to get through the Hole-in-the-Wall, Nielson replies: "But I vud say dis. Vee must go troo, even if vee cannot. ... Vaht vee need now is vaht I call stickity tootie." Later, after the company has nearly reached their destination, they meet an old Indian who asks them in broken English, "Where you come from?" "From across the Colorado River." "Where you cross big canyon?" "At a place called Hole-in-the-Rock." "The Indian snorts in disgust and rides on, muttering about it not being possible to make a wagon road through this country and insisting they were lying to him. That night at evening prayers "Nielson regaled the party by saying, 'Ven he say it not possible to build a road troo dis country, ve shood haf said, 'Yah,

ve know that now.'"

This book is sure to be a real winner under the Christmas tree for a diverse audience of readers. More good news: The book has been out long enough that you can

find it at discounted prices both online and at local bookstores.

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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 as part of an effort to expose readers to a variety of community voices. Authors, readers and editors are invited to visit [www.charlenehirschi.com](http://www.charlenehirschi.com).

