



Sarah's Son

Jerry Eicher

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Sarah Yoder scares away demons, shelters Iraqi terrorists, and witnesses her son's miraculous healing, all while frying up the bacon, raising her children, performing her wifely duties, and keeping a spotless house. Eicher brings together an enticing array of conflicts in his novel: faith healing, terrorists, the hidden Amish rituals and life, and even an Amish quasi-witch healer. He ties the novel to the Amish school shooting that made headlines in 2006 and creates a strong, courageous protagonist in Sarah Yoder. Unfortunately, the novel suffers from inconsistencies and amateur mistakes, but shines when the story focuses on the Amish church, elders, and conflicts between old order and new.

Sarah and her husband Melvin Yoder were introduced in the first novel of Eicher's "Sarah" series. *Sarah's Son*, the second installment, opens as Sarah and Melvin take their two sons and join Mennonite relatives on a cross-country car trip on vacation from their Indiana home to Colorado. The author wedges a flagrant advertisement for the Christian organization Focus on the Family in this travelogue. The novel bulges with minutia about every obscure, touristy site the couples visit, rather than setting the scene or fleshing out characters. In chapter nine, Eicher presents an exchange among the travelers that makes an information dump almost enjoyable as Sarah explains more than anyone wants to know about every oddly named town in Trego County. It ends with the driver saying, "Colby is coming up in about an hour. I won't need any information about it..."

The police stop the couples on their journey and warn them of a terrorist cell that is targeting them. This segment brings to mind the story line of Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man is Hard to Find"; but it lacks the exposition, detail, and research necessary to achieve the quality of writing or authenticity of O'Connor's work. Stereotypical cell members follow the Yoder couple to their farm, but aspects of this story line lay undeveloped and lack credibility. Violence in this book is relatively nonexistent. A thread concerning Sarah's son suffering from leukemia ends abruptly without proper development or denouement. The dialogue grates and many readers may not make it through the first 100 pages. Sadly the novel is riddled by inconsistencies and novice writing mistakes as well as a preachy tone on a variety of subjects. If the author could maintain the quality of writing and research seen in segments featuring the ministers and members of the Amish church, this novel could be a delight.

DAWN GOLDSMITH (January 11, 2008)

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