

The Gold Digger Book Club Kit



Dear Readers,

Thank you so much for choosing to read *The Gold Digger*. This is the third book I've written for the True Colors crime series, and to be honest, it was my favorite to write. I'm not sure why. Perhaps it's that I got to spend a day at the LaPorte County Historical Society museum and wander through the exhibits, including one on Belle Guinness that contained actual photographs, letters, and items from the Guinness farm. Perhaps it's that the people who worked there were so kind to me and allowed me to peruse their collection and read first-hand accounts and newspaper articles. Perhaps it's that I got to see the area where these crimes were committed in person and that gave me a special connection.

Each book I write is special to me in some way. I fell in love with Nils and Ingrid and often forgot they were real people. No, don't call a psychiatrist for me. I'm simply a writer. Though the crimes were gruesome, I purposely wove in a thread of hope. Nils and Ingrid must learn what family is and how important it is. They must also learn that, though sometimes family fails us, God never will.

This is the point in the letter I would tell you to enjoy the story. I'll be truthful-this may be a difficult book to read. Though I don't go into detail about the gruesomeness of the crimes, there is no whitewashing what happened. Difficult as it may be, though, it is important that we recognize there always has been and always will be evil in this world. But as the hymn, This Is My Father's World reminds us:

*O let me ne'er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong
God is the Ruler yet.*

Whatever you are facing now, may the words of this song and the story of *The Gold Digger* bring hope and peace to your heart.

Blessings,
Liz

Book Club Questions

1. Even though Ingrid and Belle have their disagreements throughout the book, Ingrid is her sister's biggest supporter. To Ingrid, nothing is more important than family, no matter what. Why do you think that is? Can even dysfunctional families have close relationships? How was Sven's and Nils's relationship different from Ingrid and Belle's? How was it the same?
2. Ingrid has a difficult time wrapping her mind around what her sister did because of this importance of family. Belle has done so much for Ingrid since she came to the States that Ingrid is unable or unwilling to see what is in front of her very eyes. Can your love for a family member cloud your judgement? In what ways?
3. *The Gold Digger* is based on historical events. These crimes went undetected underneath the noses of some of the best of LaPorte's lawmen for years. Why was that? Would Belle have been able to get away with her crimes today?
4. Many characterize shyness as stand-offishness and even conceit. How did Ingrid deal with her shyness? How did Nils influence her to come out of her shell? What else helped to overcome her shyness?
5. After you read the author's note at the back of the book, what is the historical fact about the story that surprised you the most? Why was that?
6. How did Nils's father influence what he was like as an adult? Was Nils wise to take the loan to get the automobile dealership started? Was there a better way he could have handled it?
7. As children grow older and parents age, children often become protective of their parents. How do we see this in Nils? Was he justified in keeping certain things from his mother?
8. Hope is a major theme of the book. In what ways do you see this hope in the midst of darkness?
9. Why was Nils so determined to find out what happened to Sven? Is his persistence in this matter an admirable quality? Why or why not?
10. Over and over again, Ingrid closed her eyes and tried to rationalize what Belle was doing. If you had a close relative you believed was involved in a crime, what would you do?

Author Interview

Why did you pick these particular crimes to write about?

I was searching for another two proposals to send to Barbour Publishing to be included in this series. In the course of searching for a crime that might make a good story, I came across what happened in LaPorte in the early 1900s. Needless to say, I was horrified. But the more I read about the crimes, the more fascinated I became with them, and a story grew around them. Not a story only about the cruelty and evil in the world, but also a story about light in the midst of great darkness.

When you write a book, do you plot it out, or do you write it on the fly?

In my real life, I'm the ultimate planner. I started planning my daughter's high school graduation party two years before she finished her senior year. Her wedding is planned-and she doesn't even have a boyfriend LOL! When we go on vacation, I plan what we're going to do each day, where we're going to stay, even where we're going to eat. I try not to be too obsessive about this, but it's hard.

When it comes to my writing, though, I can't plan. The mere thought of it gives me hives! When I do try to plan, the story never follows that outline, so why bother? For me, the best part about writing is watching the story unfold in front of my eyes. I never know what's going to happen each day when I sit down in front of my computer. I get to take the story journey just as you do.

Author Interview

Tell us about the research you did for the Gold Digger.

I did an extensive amount of reading about the crimes before I even began writing. I'm fortunate to live only a few hours away from LaPorte, Indiana, and I have relatives in the area, so I spent a glorious day there elbow deep in research, filling up a notebook and snapping about a hundred photographs. It wasn't until my cousin called me and told me it was getting dark and was snowing that I even realized what time it was.

The volunteers and staff at the LaPorte Historical Society museum couldn't have been more gracious. I missed their resident expert on these crimes as he was on vacation, but there were more than enough resources for me to explore. I read newspaper accounts from LaPorte and all over the country. I read the coroner's report on some of the victims. I searched through church records, photographs, and the museum exhibit. There is so much of my research that didn't make it into the book!

As you can tell, research is my favorite part of writing a book. I would have happily spent three days there instead of just one. Going through the exhibit and looking at some actual artifacts brought the story home for me. It made it come alive to me. It's not always possible to visit the locations of my books, but when I do get the chance, I make the most out of it.

Author Interview

The author's notes at the end of the book are pretty extensive as well. Are you also a genealogy buff?

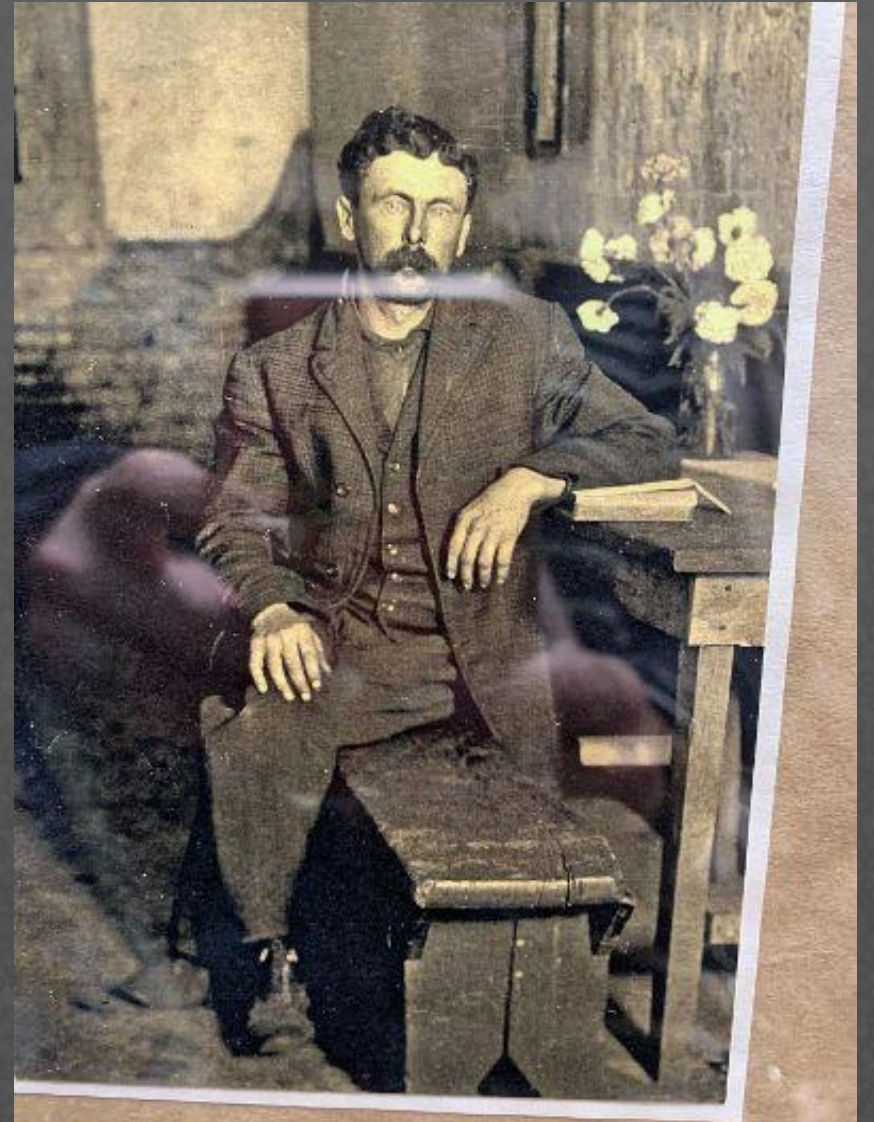
I am! I could spend all day on genealogical websites sifting through records and putting together my family tree. In fact, I've traced my family back to the 1500s and some of my husband's back to the 1200s (and still going). When I finished writing *The Gold Digger*, I wanted to find out what happened to the real people involved in the story. Belle Guinness didn't leave any direct descendants, but she did have a sister who lived in Illinois. It was fun to trace that line and discover there are a good many people alive today from her sister's line. It was also fun to find out what happened to Andrew Helgelien and to his family. He also has living descendants. Really, it was hard not to get too caught up in the genealogy. It was also hard to refrain from stalking some people on Facebook and asking them if they realize their family story!

Pictures From Research



Belle Gunness with her children

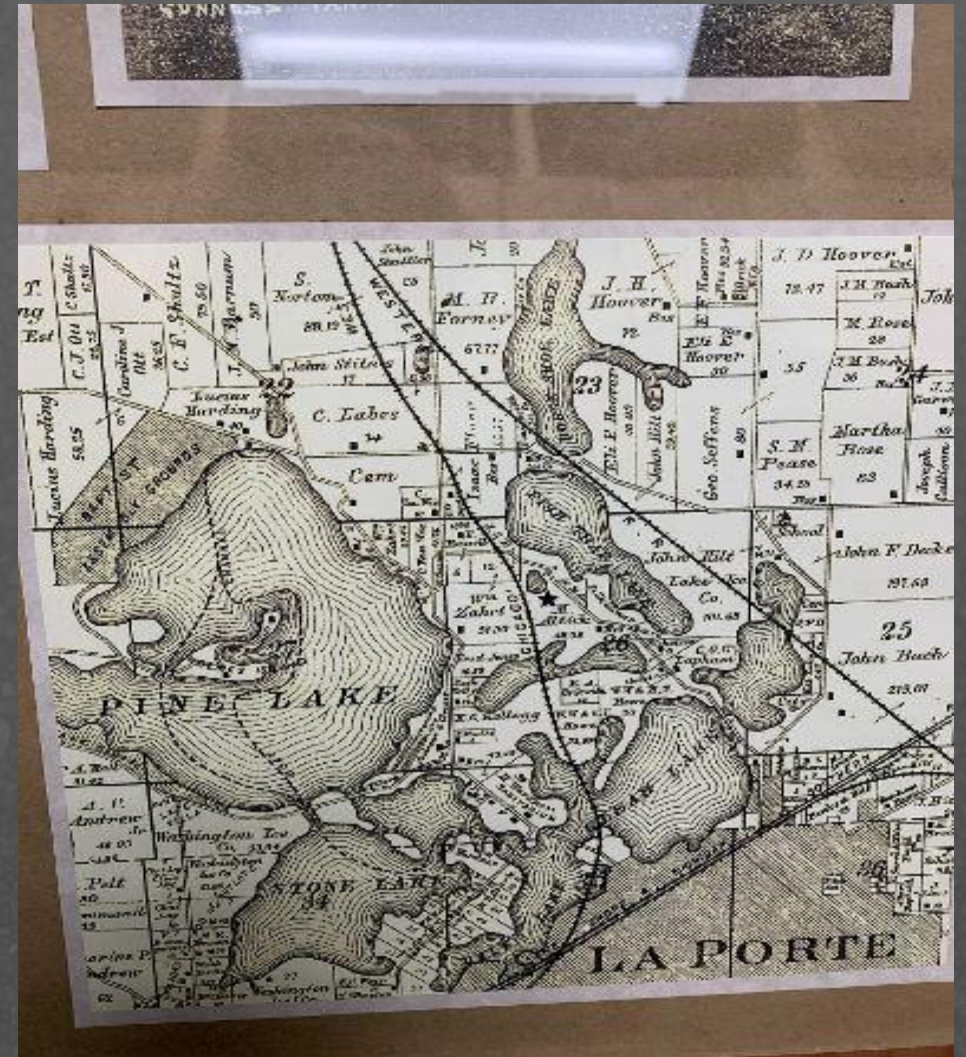
Ray Lamphere



Pictures From Research



Guinness Home



Map of Laporte, Indiana

Recipe for Blotkake

Recipe Adapted from North Wild Kitchen Blog: <https://northwildkitchen.com/blotkake-norwegian-cream-cake/>

Sponge Cake:

5 eggs
¾ cups sugar
1 ¼ cups flour
1 tsp baking powder

Preheat your oven to 325 degrees Fahrenheit. Cut out a circle of parchment paper and grease the bottom. Place on a spring form pan. Grease sides of pan and top of parchment. Mix eggs and sugar in a mixer until it becomes stiff and a light color (approximately 6-8 minutes on medium or high speed). Sift in flour and baking powder. Mix in with spatula. Pour batter into pan and place on a cookie sheet.

Custard

2 egg yolks
¼ cup sugar
2 tablespoons corn starch
2 cups whole milk
½ tsp vanilla extract

Whisk together eggs yolks and sugar. Add cornstarch and mix in until it looks a pale yellow and is thick. In a separate saucepan, combine milk and vanilla extract. Warm the milk (don't let it boil) and slowly add the heated milk with the sugar and egg mixture. Once mixed, put it back into the saucepan and put it back on the stove. Cook until mixture has thickened. Allow time to cool.

Whipped Cream

3 cups whipping cream
2 ½ tablespoons powdered sugar

Whip the two ingredients in a mixer on medium or high until stiff.

Other:

Jam
Milk or Juice
Berries or fruit of your choice

Cut sponge into 3 layers. Take the first layer and spoon over the milk or juice. Spread jam on top, then add the custard and finally, the whipped cream. Place the second layer on top and repeat. Place the 3rd layer on top, spreading on the rest on the whipped cream on the top and sides. Decorate with berries or fruit.

Quiz: Before or After 1907?

The Gold Digger opens in 1907. The automobile was new and was gaining in popularity, as were many other inventions. Test yourself. Were these items invented before or after 1907?

1. Rotary Dial Telephone
2. Air Conditioning
3. Fortune cookie
4. Ice pop
5. Binder clip
6. Lincoln logs
7. Adhesive bandage
8. Automatic Transmission
9. Windshield wipers
10. Masking Tape



Passionate might best describe Liz Tolsma. She loves writing, research, and editing. Her passion shone through in her first novel which was a double award finalist. On any given day, you might find her pulling weeds in her perennial garden, walking her hyperactive dog, or curled up with a good book. Nothing means more to her than her family. She's married her high-school sweetheart. Get her talking about international adoption, and you might never get her to stop. She and her husband adopted three children, including a son who is a U.S. Marine, and two daughters.