

Carol DeMar writes under the pen name of C.J. Loveland. Carol is Director of Curriculum Development and Research at American Vision, Inc., and is currently editing an American history textbook series being produced by American Vision.

She holds a B.S. degree in Elementary Education, was a reading consultant for MacMillan Publishing Company, and taught school for seventeen years at the elementary level. In addition to her involvement in Christian education as a teacher, Carol is presently a board member of Midway Covenant Christian School, a classical school, and was a board member of Dominion Christian High School.

Carol and her husband, Gary, have two grown sons and reside in Marietta, Georgia.

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Book Review

REVIEWED BY C. J. LOVELAND

Douglas Wilson is a pastor, magazine editor, and author of numerous books on education, marriage and parenting, but *Blackthorn Winter* is his first voyage into children's fiction. He has written a winner on his first attempt. If your children enjoy reading about pirates and buried treasure, this swashbuckling tale will entertain them. The adventure is set on the Chesapeake Bay during the third year of the reign of Good Queen Anne (1705). Fifteen-year-old Thomas Ingle lives with his widowed mother who supports them by working as a day servant for a wealthy tobacco merchant. They live in two

Blackthorn Winter

by Douglas Wilson

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small rooms at the back of one of the town's inns. The owner charges a most reasonable rent, and in exchange, Sarah Ingle helps out in the inn during busy times. Thomas helps with the horses. Thomas wants to be apprenticed as a ship's boy so he can help support his mother. But she has insisted that he finish his schooling first. Jim Ingle, Thomas's father, was lost at sea five years earlier to a storm or pirates—no one knows for sure.

The day arrives when Sarah Ingle gives Thomas permission to seek out an apprenticeship with one of the captains. James Monroe of the *Prudent Hannah* is recommended as an honorable man but one who is a stickler for requiring hard work from his deck hands. Thomas will probably have to prove that he can handle the work before Captain Monroe makes him a part of his crew. Thomas is diligent

in his work and more than ready to prove he is up to the task, but the *Prudent Hannah* isn't due back from Jamaica for a month. To fill his days while waiting for the ship to return to port, Thomas does odd jobs at the inn and spends some of his free time taking long walks.

One afternoon finds Thomas many miles from town at the end of a small inlet. Before Thomas starts for home, he sees three men leave a sloop and row toward him in a shore boat. He quickly hides from their sight line, and from his

perch atop a large mulberry tree, Thomas watches the pirates bury a small package. He makes out bits and pieces of their conversation

and realizes that the pirates have buried information concerning a treasure. Thomas watches horrified as the one pirate uses his pistols to kill the other two men when they row back to the sloop. What Thomas has witnessed will eventually change his life forever as well as the lives of future generations of his family.

This is a cleverly woven tale of uncommon honor in the face of insidious treachery that stretches from the days of cutlasses and muskets to the present.

The book is wonderfully illustrated and printed on gloss paper. To add to its value, the publisher has seen fit to Smyth sew the binding for a lifetime of use. Smyth sewing is the old-school way of printing. There are only a handful of publishers who Smyth sew their hardbacks. It's almost unheard of for a paperback to be Smyth sewn.