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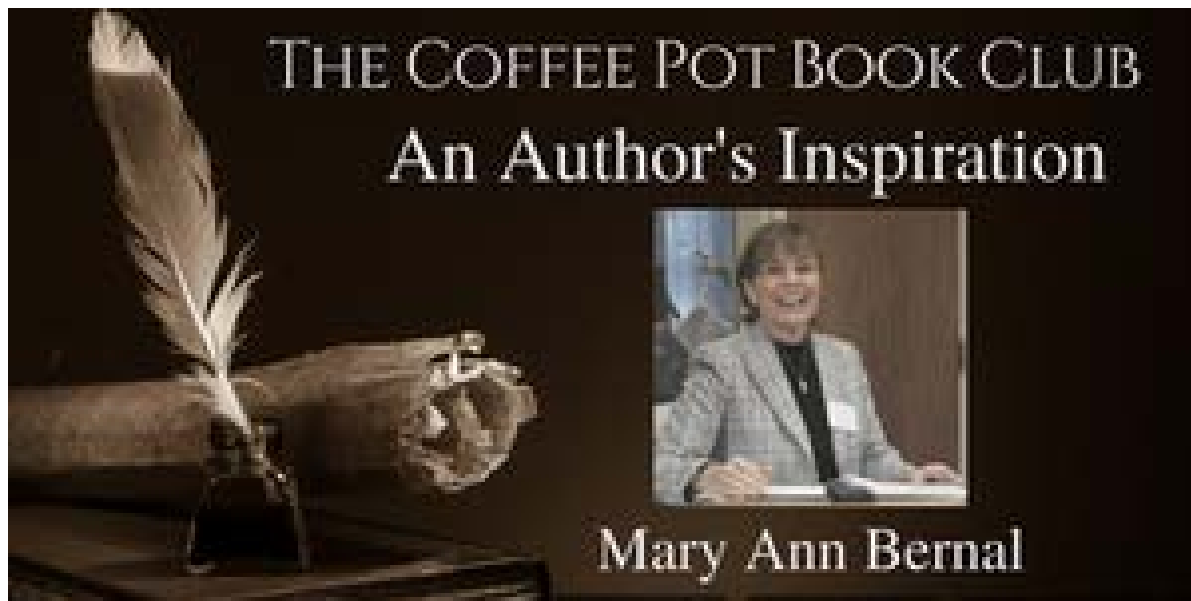


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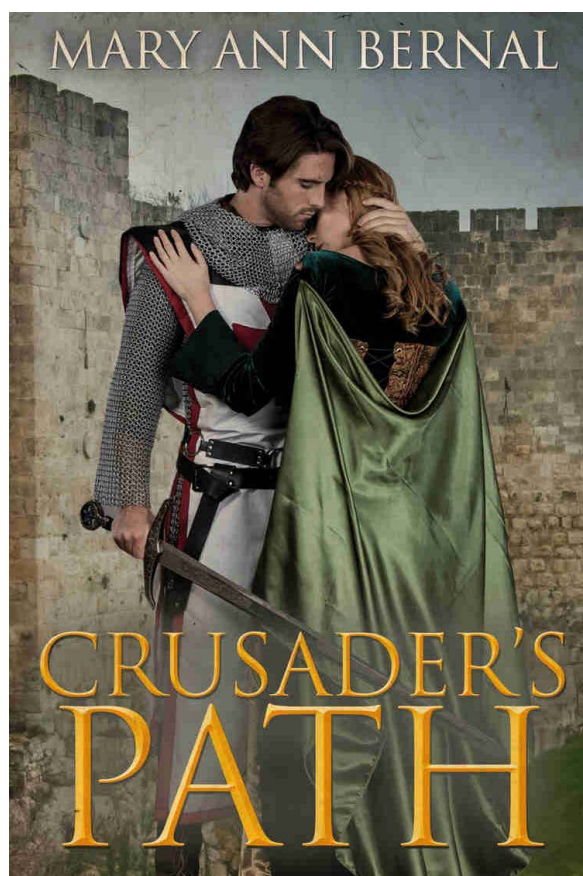
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## An Author's Inspiration: Meet #HistoricalFiction author, Mary Ann Bernal @BritonandDane



Crusader's Path

By Mary Ann Bernal



Publication Date: 12th April 2020

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Page Length: 224 Pages (Hardcover)

Genre: Historical Fiction / Historical Romance

From the sweeping hills of Argences to the port city of Cologne overlooking the River Rhine, Etienne and Avielle find themselves drawn by the need for redemption against the backdrop of the First Crusade.

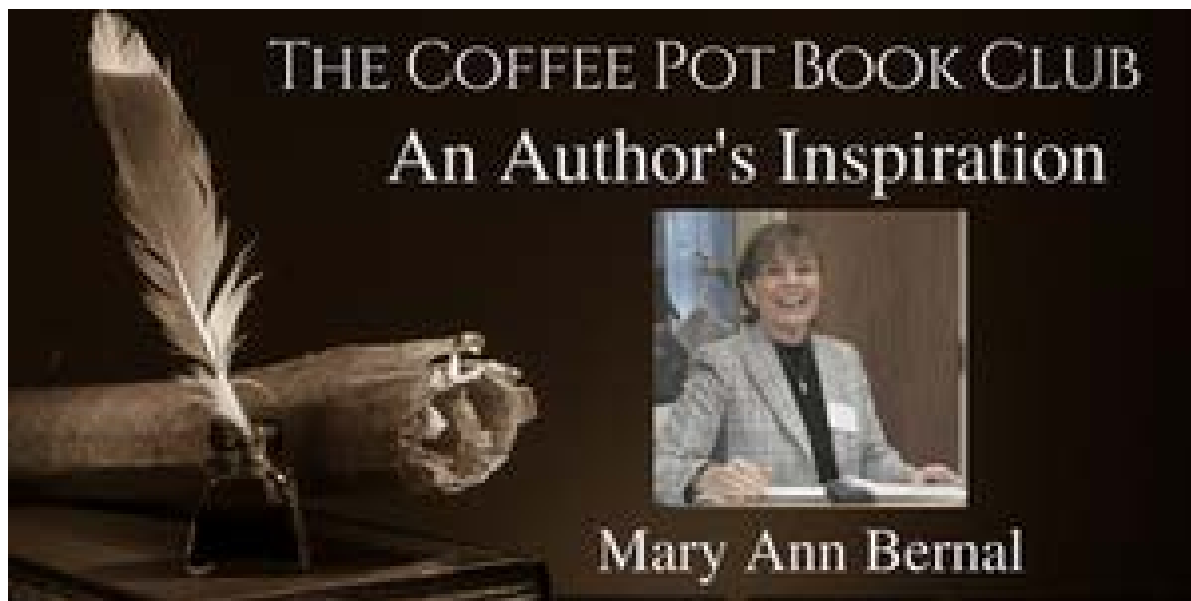
Heeding the call of His Holiness, Urban II, to free the Holy Land from the infidel, Etienne follows Duke Robert of Normandy across the treacherous miles, braving sweltering heat and snow-covered mountain passes while en route to the Byzantine Empire.

Moved by Peter of Amiens' charismatic rhetoric in the streets of the Holy Roman Empire, Avielle joins the humble army of pilgrims. Upon arrival in Mentz, the peasant Crusaders do the unthinkable, destroying the Jewish Community. Consumed with guilt, Avielle is determined to die fighting for Christ, assuring her place in Heaven.

Etienne and Avielle cross paths in Constantinople, where they commiserate over past misdeeds. A spark becomes a flame, but when Avielle contracts leprosy, Etienne makes a promise to God, offering to take the priest cowl in exchange for ridding Avielle of her affliction.

Will Etienne be true to his word if Avielle is cleansed of the contagion, or will he risk eternal damnation to be with the woman he loves?

Author's Inspiration



In my ongoing interest in the human psyche and why people behave the way they do, I discovered most individuals react in the same way when coming in contact with a person who may or may not have a communicable disease.

When I had a bout of shingles a while back, I was fortunate – only one hand and wrist were affected, a few manageable lesions that did not spread, just five or six clusters lining one finger, easily covered with Band-Aids.

While speaking to several coworkers, I noticed their peculiar behavior the minute I said the word shingles. They stepped away – distancing themselves a few feet from where I stood as if my covered finger would contaminate them.

Of course, I was not contagious, but the fear emanating after hearing the word shingles seemed to set protective gears in motion, leaving as quickly as one could without appearing rude.

What immediately came to mind was how people with infectious diseases had been treated throughout the centuries. The recent remake of *Ben Hur* in 2016 reminded me of Charlton Heston's portrayal of Judah and how he interacted with his mother and sister, who had contracted the disease while in prison.

Many movies were made about the Crusades and leper warriors throughout the years, such as King Baldwin IV of Jerusalem. The Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem established a military order to care

for the hospitalized lepers around 1119 AD.

Remember Richard the Lionheart joining the Third Crusade to fight his nemesis, the notable Saladin? And don't forget the Robin Hood movies, which reference the famous outlaw's experiences fighting the Infidel. Recognizable names and places because of Hollywood, all filmed with creative license meant to entertain and are not necessarily historically accurate.

However, in recent years, the atrocities of warfare have been articulated with documentaries and dramatic television series where the brutality of the age is showcased and not swept into the background. In *Knightsfall*, we see a leper knight whose face is covered by a mask. Yes, there were warriors affected by the disease who fought valiantly during every campaign over the years.

But I wanted to go back to the beginning, to the First Crusade, to understand what drove the warriors of Christ to leave their homes, enduring untold hardships for a holy cause. It took years to reach the Holy Land, a feat not everyone accomplished, dying en route from disease, starvation, and battle.

Creating a narrative set during the First Crusade satisfied a two-fold desire to discern the truth about life in such a turbulent era.

Lepers were shunned and, to this day, still bear the stigma for having the disease. Delving into the minds of human beings is fascinating because of the different perceptions. Where one sees a victim struck down by God, another sees an unfortunate soul suffering from an infliction through no fault of their own.

And what of the reasoning behind the Crusades, and what mitigating factors drove the men and women to travel to an unknown land. The peasant class had no clue as to what the undertaking meant, never having ventured out of their village.

I wonder if Pope Urban II would have started his quest to free the Holy Land from the Infidel if he knew his mission would set off a series of events that has transcended the centuries. In our modern era, there is still a holy war being fought in the Middle East. With the advances in warfare, all that has changed are the weapons. Battles are still being fought in the name of God, religious wars, man-made, making the assumption God wills it. In reality, the quest for power and wealth drives a primeval need to dominate the weak, worldwide dominion, reminiscent of the saying, only the strong will survive.

It took three years for the Princes' Army to reach Jerusalem, where the remnants of a once-massive military force did what no one expected. The Christian flag flew above the tower of the Lord's city, a hard-fought victory never to be repeated over the ensuing years.


As in *Romeo and Juliet* and the *Outlander* series, *Crusader's Path* has more than one main character. The story takes an in-depth look at how leprosy and religious warfare affected the individual. Avielle, a commoner, conforms to the laws of the land, but her compassion for the afflicted grows because of her personal experience. Yet, she must behave according to the mores of the time, and many of her decisions stem from having to live within those rules.

On the other hand, Etienne defies accepted values, his status giving him license to do as he pleases. He casts everything aside as he follows his ducal lord, Robert, but he is not judged as Avielle would have been for the same infraction.

Whether or not you agree with their decisions reverts to your perception of what is and is not acceptable.

Were the conditions and rules harsh in the Eleventh Century? Yes, they were. What would you have done in a similar situation? Can you feel empathy for Avielle and Etienne and even the ducal lord, Robert, whose selfishness fits his entitled persona? If you judge them according to the principles imposed in their century and not ours, would you be surprised by your verdict?


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## *About the author*

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**Mary Ann Bernal** attended Mercy College, Dobbs Ferry, NY, where she received a degree in Business Administration. Her literary aspirations were ultimately realized when the first book of The Briton and the Dane novels was published in 2009. In addition to writing historical fiction, Mary Ann has also authored a collection of contemporary short stories in the Scribbler Tales series and a science fiction/fantasy novel entitled Planetary Wars Rise of an Empire. Her recent work includes Crusader's Path, a redemption story set against the backdrop of the First Crusade, and Forgiving Nero, a novel of Ancient Rome.

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