



## Promise to Return

*Elizabeth Byler Younts*

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When World War II breaks out, Miriam's fiancé, Henry, is drafted and sent to a conscientious objector camp. But when Henry feels called to fight on the front lines, he goes against the Amish church to follow God's will—forcing Miriam to choose between the rules of her religion and the leading of her heart.

It's 1943 and Miriam Coblenz and Henry Mast are nearing their wedding day when the unthinkable happens—Henry is drafted. However, since he is a part of the pacifist Amish tradition, Henry is sent to a conscientious objector Civilian Public Service camp. When he leaves for the work camp, his gaping absence turns Miriam's life upside down. Little does she know that it's only the beginning...

When Henry returns home, he brings news that shakes Miriam and their Amish community to the core. He tells Miriam he believes God has called him to enlist in the Army and fight for his country, leaving her to make an important decision. She soon must choose between loyalty to the peaceful life she's always known and her love for Henry and her faith in their shared destiny.

Two worlds collide in this unforgettable debut novel, providing a fascinating and rare look into Amish culture during World War II. While Henry is battling enemies across the ocean, Miriam struggles between devotion to Henry and her love of the Amish way of life. One question is at the bottom of it all: will she follow her religion or her heart?

## Promise to Return Details

Date : Published October 8th 2013 by Howard Books

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Author : Elizabeth Byler Younts

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## From Reader Review Promise to Return for online ebook

### Carol says

I love both Amish Fiction and Historical Fiction so I immediately wanted to read Promise to Return by Elizabeth Younts. I was not a bit disappointed. When my father was alive, he met a black person for the first time in the army training camps. He wrote about it in one of his letters to my mother. He talked about how poorly they were treated and being separate all the time. So I wondered about the Amish during that time period.

When the Amish men were drafted, they had the option to work in a Civilian Public Service camp because of being conscientious objectors. The Amish believe that war is a violation of the commandment "Thou Shall Not Kill". So a soldier commits murder when he kills an enemy.

Miriam Colbentz has always loved being Amish, especially how the community comes together when someone is in need. She wants to be obedient and not violate any rules. Just before the time that she and Henry Mast were to get married, Henry was drafted so he went to the Civilian Public Service. There he made some friends who were not Amish and was exposed to the world news. After he heard what was happening to the Jewish, he felt that God was calling him to enlist and protect them. This caused him a lot of torment; he loved Miriam so very much and knew that it would make her life very difficult for her. He didn't even want to tell her why because the Amish community was sheltered from much of the world news.

Miriam has to make a lot of difficult decisions from then on. She wants to marry her true love and also continue to be Amish. This story was written with great sensitivity and understanding of the Amish and the outsiders. I immediately felt for Miriam and her impossible situation which required a terrible decision from her. Sometimes I thought I knew what she would decide but situations changed and so I couldn't find out what she would do until the end. I am very interested in reading the next book in this series about what happens when another member of the community has to serve In the Civilian Public Service. I was surprised to find out that there quite a few of those camps in my home state of Indiana when I searched on the Internet.

I highly recommend this book to all Amish fiction fans and those interested in United States Historical Fiction.

I received this as a win from FirstReads but that in no way determined the thoughts and ideas in my review.

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### Cindy says

This is my first book to read from this author and I enjoyed it very much. I did enjoy the book, at first I kept thinking this is like another author's story that I recently read, but as I read on, I saw that Elizabeth had a totally different story. I loved Henry, and wanted to smack Eli. He was not a good friend to Henry, nor Miriam. I enjoyed the realistic view we had of an Amish family, with Elizabeth's family being Amish, she was able to give us a great view of that. My favorite side story in this book, was Kathryn. It really spoke to me that while she was banned, her mother still kept in touch with her. Overall I loved the book, and enjoyed

it very much. Most definitely worthy of a five star review!

This book was provided by Howard Books for my honest review. No payment was received for this review.

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### **Barb says**

Elizabeth Byler Younts has written a wonderful book, "Promise to Return". I am eagerly awaiting the next book, "Promise of Sunrise".

Miriam Coblenz and Henry Mast have been a couple for a long time. Their story takes place in 1943 during the Second World War. When Henry is drafted, it turns their plans upside down. Because the Amish do not believe in war, Henry is sent to a Civilian Public Service camp (CPS) supposedly for the duration of the war. However, Henry is sure that God called him to enlist which he does. He wants Miriam to marry him before he is sent overseas. Because Henry is going against the Amish Ordnung, he is sure to be shunned upon returning from the war and Miriam is reluctant to cause her family more hurt. Miriam's family has been shamed once before when her sister Kathryn left the community to marry an Englisher, who is also now a soldier. The story of Miriam and Henry shows just how the beliefs of this community can dictate the actions of its members.

I felt sorry for Henry most of the way through the book. I was sympathetic and irritated at the same time with Miriam because she seemed to let her parents and other members of the community dictate what she would do with her life...her, a grown woman. I was also quite frustrated for her that her siblings seemed to leave the care of their parents all in her hands. They seemed to think that she should give up her life to their parents' care while they led the lives they wanted without thought to the welfare of their parents.

I always enjoy novels portraying the Amish and the kind of life that they lead, but this time I saw practices that I would have trouble living with myself. I think that this story will help me keep a better perspective when reading other Christian based novels. I'm sure that the fact that the author once lived as Amish helped make this book so believable.

I received a free copy of this book from Howard Books in return for my honest review. The opinions expressed here are my own.

You can find this review on my blog at <http://wp.me/p2pjIt-8f>.

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### **Laura says**

Title: PROMISE TO RETURN

Author: Elizabeth Byler Younts

Publisher: Howard Books

October 2013

ISBN: 978-1476735016

Genre: Amish/historical/WWII

When World War II breaks out, Miriam Coblenz's peaceful Amish world is turned upside down...

It's 1943, and Miriam Coblenz and Henry Mast are nearing their wedding day when the unthinkable happens—Henry is drafted. However, since he is a part of the pacifist Amish tradition, Henry is sent to a conscientious objector Civilian Public Service camp. When he leaves for the work camp, his gaping absence turns Miriam's life upside down. Little does she know it's only the beginning...

When Henry returns home, he brings news that shakes Miriam and their Amish community to the core. Henry believes God has called him to enlist in the army and fight for his country, leaving her to make an important decision: whether to choose loyalty to the peaceful life she's always known or her love for Henry.

Two worlds collide in this unforgettable debut novel, providing a fascinating and rare look into Amish culture during World War II. While Henry is battling enemies across the ocean, Miriam struggles between her devotion to Henry and her love of the Amish way of life. One question is at the bottom of it all: will she follow the rules of her religion or the leading of her heart?

PROMISE TO RETURN is Ms. Younts debut fiction novel—and the first book in her The Promise of Sunrise series. I fell in love with Henry – such a wonderful young man who was willing to be led by God despite the rules of the church – and Miriam who is afraid to do anything but toe-the-line. I wanted her to break free a few times and do what Henry wished for her to do. And I got upset at her and Henry's best friend several times.

Fans of Amish fiction will devour Ms. Younts' PROMISE TO RETURN. Having Amish family, Ms. Younts writes things that the average Amish writer wouldn't think to include. And the threat of WWII and the quiet lives of the Amish—it is fascinating to read how they might interact. I knew Amish served as conscientious objectors or were drafted, but it is totally believable that one might've enlisted on his own. Discussion questions and an interview with Ms. Younts are included at the end of the book. \$14.99. 320 pages. 5 stars.

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## **Marian Baay says**

1943

Miriam Coblenz is a young Amish woman who wants nothing more than to be obedient to her church, get married to the love of her life, Henry Mast, and to become a mother. However, shortly before their marriage, Henry is drafted and everything becomes complicated.

At first Henry is serving as a conscientious objector at a Civilian Public Service camp, but during this time there he learns how bad the war in Europe really is and he feels God's call to enlist. Before his training starts, he comes home on leave and tells his family and Miriam that he's going to fight in the war. His family is hurt and doesn't want him to stay under their roof anymore. Miriam doesn't understand why Henry made this decision. His attitude towards God seems to be changing as well—he so easily talks about praying to God and hearing His voice.

Miriam is so confused—is she going to wait for Henry's return? And when he comes back, will he confess to the church he was wrong? He seems to be so sure he was right to enlist and go to war.

Her childhood friend, Eli, is trying to win her hand while Henry is away. Although Miriam likes him, she doesn't love him, but he can offer her the life she has always wanted. Is she going to wait for Henry, or does she give in to her longing to get married in the church; to become a wife and mother, like she has always

dreamed?

Against her parents' wishes, Miriam frequently writes to Henry and she anticipates his return letters, but then months go by without a word from him... Is he still alive? Then one day Henry's mother and sister visit with news from Europe...

One of the best books I have read this year! This author knows how to keep the suspense high and keep the reader guessing. Miriam's struggle was well done and I really felt for her. I have shed several tears while reading this fantastic book, so I advise keeping the tissues handy. I'm going to keep my eye on this author and I'm surely going to read the next book in this series.

\*Thanks to the publisher for providing a review copy through NetGalley.\*

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### **Heidi Robbins (Heidi Reads...) says**

This was an intense and emotional book, and I thoroughly enjoyed it! The characters have vivid personalities and realistic struggles and emotions. The chemistry between Miriam and Henry is wonderful, especially for an Amish novel. Miriam had a peaceful, orderly life, but we journey with her through the turmoil of the choices she faces and makes as her relationships and loyalties are tested in her family and community.

I could not put this book down! Even though I have a baby that still wakes up twice a night, I finished it at 2:30 am, just in time to feed her and reflect on what I had read, how blessed I felt for the time we live in now, and amazed at the strength and sacrifices of the people who lived during that period of war.

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### **Deanna says**

Once again I find myself quite enthralled by Amish Christian Fiction. I've read many this year. This was my first from Elizabeth Byler Younts. My interest in this book was stirred when I discovered it was set during WWII. Before reading this story it had never occurred to me to even wonder how the Amish Community would respond to the draft. I also was not familiar with the term "Conscientious Objector" or the "camps" that were associated with those claiming that status. So while this was a fiction book, I also got a bit of a history lesson which I enjoyed.

The book had several dilemmas to hold my interest such as a bit of a love triangle, how an Amish family would treat and/or reconcile with a shunned member, the agony of those waiting at home for word of their loved one's during the war, Miriam being caught between her love and devotion to the Amish way of life, while also wanting to love and support her beloved Henry and even the loss of a parent. I found myself wanting to keep reading just to find out if Miriam received another letter from Henry or if she had been able to figure out how to reconcile her Amish upbringing with her love for a soldier. At times I found myself a bit annoyed with Miriam because I wanted her to be stronger and less conflicted but the more I got into the story and Miriam's heart, I became more understanding of her troubles in making the right choices.

There is a wonderful element of faith in this story thru Henry's strengthening faith and realtionship with Jesus and his desire to follow God's plan even if it went against everything the Amish had taught him. I

admired his conviction, his strength and his quiet peaceful confidence in following God's leading.

It's a good book! I gave it 4 out of 5 stars on Goodreads. I was also excited to discover this is book 1 in the "Promise of Sunrise" series with book 2, entitled Promise to Cherish, due out in 2014.

I was provided with a copy of this book for a fair & honest review courtesy of Howard Books via Netgalley.

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### **Deborah says**

It's 1943, and Miriam Coblenz and Henry Mast are nearing their wedding day when the unthinkable happens—Henry is drafted. However, since he is a part of the pacifist Amish tradition, Henry is sent to a conscientious objector Civilian Public Service camp. When he leaves for the work camp, his gaping absence turns Miriam's life upside down. Little does she know it's only the beginning... When Henry returns home, he brings news that shakes Miriam and their Amish community to the core. Henry believes God has called him to enlist in the army and fight for his country, leaving her to make an important decision: whether to choose loyalty to the peaceful life she's always known or her love for Henry. Two worlds collide in this unforgettable debut novel, providing a fascinating and rare look into Amish culture during World War II. While Henry is battling enemies across the ocean, Miriam struggles between her devotion to Henry and her love of the Amish way of life. One question is at the bottom of it all: will she follow the rules of her religion or the leading of her heart?

My Review:

While the Christian market is being flooded by the Amish genre in the last 16 years, this one is a chart topper. Filled with suspense and the authentic voice of someone who has grown up Amish, Younts write a not-to-be missed debut novel that gives us a glimpse of Amish culture during World War II. This is the kind of book that leaves you wanting more of this kind of setting, and the writing was stunning, remarkable and absolutely magnificent.

My favorite element of this novel was the portrayal of the angst that Miriam felt as she tries to decide whether or not to wait for Henry. I have to admit, I love novels that paints the hero and heroine at odds because of elements outside of their control; their parents, their beliefs, their situations, etc. I am a sucker for any story that keeps the lead characters from each other not by their desire, but by things they cannot change. This is a well written work that deserves recognition for what it is: a fresh look into the history of World War II, through the eyes of the same Amish we have all learned so much about in recent years.

This book was provided by Howard Books for free in exchange for an honest review.

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### **Faith says**

Calling all readers: You want to read this book.

I just finished it ten minutes ago and I have been telling everyone in earshot for the last hours: This is an out-of-the-ballpark Amish novel.

In fact, for those of us who are wary of Amish "bonnet" novels, let me put it this way:  
Promise to Return is a grand story.

Promise to Return is a complex love story. I found it extremely believable in its hopes and confusions. It was agonizing at times, as Miriam tried to find a steady guide in this crazy world to navigate the paths laid out before her. More than once, I feared that the craziness would cause a heart to break beyond repair. This is one of the few books I have read where the relationship triangle was spot-on and added depth instead of taking it away. There were times when I was unsure, like Miriam herself, of who I wanted her to love... although not \*too\* unsure, because Henry is a fine character and a very good man.

May I repeat: This romance was well done.

Promise to Return is a war story. That is why I really wanted this book, because it's about World War Two soldiers. The author, Elizabeth Byler Younts, was raised Amish as a child and is now a home-schooling Mom and the wife of an Air Force Officer. The authenticity of this book that I could feel bone-deep as I read, that comes from her life experience. This is why her story shines when she writes about soldiers and the people who love them, and why she was able to bring Miriam's inner world to life. No matter how the times and places changes from then to now, the heart of the matter doesn't.

There are some books that are okay to stay in for a vacation, other that I've wanted to live in them. Seeds of Evidence, The Ollie Chandler Series, Burning Sky, Small Town Girl...I can think of a few books I would live inside. Right now, this is one of them.

Promise to Return is a book full of characters I would love to meet. Miriam herself, who's power to make decisions seems frail at times, and I'd cheer for her and then say "I'd have been torn the same way she was." Henry, who is a giver. He gives grace and forgiveness and care. And then Eli who seems to be a taker, used to taking whatever he wants. And Mrs. Poole, a non-Amish woman whose Christianity is a beautiful thing. And a whole bunch of other folks I can't name by name because they're part of the plot.

I'm afraid of saying too much more. Just go read the book.

Thank you Howard Books for sending me my copy to review!!!

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### **Kathleen (Kat) Smith says**

On the day that Miriam Coblenz and Henry Matz are meeting with the bishops to discuss their upcoming wedding plans, Henry receives his draft notice. They had almost made it, but now the war will be what keeps them apart for now. Since Henry is Amish and killing others goes against his religious beliefs in the Ten Commandments, he is assigned tasks as a conscientious objector in the Civilian Public Service camp, digging trenches and other tasks. However it isn't without risks.

Will Miriam be able to find the same man after Henry serves his time during World War II, or will the horrors he witnesses take a toll on the man he used to be? How will the men that Henry deals with, the English, see him as one who refuses to fight? Will they have any respect for a man who refuses to defend his own country?

In the novel, Promise to Return by author Elizabeth Byler Younts, this novel picks at a subject most don't come to think about, how the Amish dealt with World War II. I think Elizabeth utilizes all her knowledge and experience both being raised Amish and having a husband who serves in the armed service to blend

together a wonderful and compelling story of how much we are willing to risk to serve not only others but our country as well.

Miriam is feeling overwhelmed because of what she has been brought up to believe as well as what the Amish community has been saying not only about Henry but about what will come of their wedding when Henry returns. She takes to heart what people are saying not only to her but about Henry and at times is at odds trying to defend their beliefs. She worries that she might not ever see her dreams about being married and raising a family come to pass especially when Henry returns on a short leave at Christmas and tells her about the discrimination facing the Amish men by the English and their beliefs in not wanting to fight when they are so desperately needed. Henry surprises Miriam when he tells her that he has decided to enlist because it is something he believes God is calling him to do. But is it really?

Now Henry will face shunning by the Amish community when he returns because he has taken it upon himself to enter the war efforts and it is simply more than Miriam can take. Meanwhile there is a man who has an interest in her, Eli and now with Henry out of the picture, will he be able to persuade Miriam that her best interests lie in marrying him instead? You'll have to pick up this novel and find out.

I received *Promise to Return* by Elizabeth Byler Younts compliments of Howard Books, a division of Simon and Schuster Publishers for my honest review and received no monetary compensation for a favorable review. Being a huge fan of World War II fiction as well as Amish Romance, I was thrilled to be able to read this one. I never really considered how the Amish had to deal with the war effort until picking this one up and really loved the conflict for Henry. Trying to decide what is the right thing to do without all the added peer pressure not only from the American soldiers but also from his Amish community. Definitely a hard place to be and trying to convince Miriam that he still plans on marrying her when he returns if she will wait for him. Definitely a task worthy of faith in God and one that takes the reader on an unforgettable journey! I rate this one a 5 out of 5 stars! There is a great reading guide that is perfect for book clubs as well as a letter to readers from the author explaining her idea in writing this book being a former Amish member and what people had to deal with regarding entering the war as Amish residents.

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### **Brandi (Rambles of a SAHM) says**

If you think you don't like Amish fiction, I would urge you to give this one a try before you write the whole genre off. To say it is different from the run of the mill Amish fiction book is an understatement.

I never gave a thought to how World War II affected the Amish. I just assumed that since they were conscientious objectors that they would be exempt from service and then just carry on with their lives. In actuality, when an Amish man was drafted he had to go serve in a Civilian Public Service camp. Now if that isn't interesting enough, think about what would happen if an Amish man felt like God was telling him to join the Army.

That is the premise of this book. Henry Mast who has always been a caring and upstanding member of the Amish community has the deep conviction that God is requiring him to enlist and serve his country. This decision has very far reaching repercussions. He was just weeks away from marrying Miriam Coblenz when he was drafted. She was content to wait for him when he was at the CPS camp but now that he is going against the beliefs of the Amish community that she loves where does that leave her? What about Henry's parents and siblings? How will they withstand this shame that Henry has brought upon their family? What about when/if Henry returns from his service? How will he fit back in to the community?

This is an absolutely fascinating read. When I first began reading it I wasn't sure that I was going to like it at all. I am part of a very proud military family and the whole conscientious objector theme at the beginning of the novel just didn't set well with me. But the farther I got into the story the more I liked it. Elizabeth Younts' writing is captivating. Most likely this is because she is not only from an Amish family but she is an air force officer's wife. Both of those aspects bring an authenticity to the story.

For all the Amish fiction lovers out there this is a must read. For all the skeptics this is one to give a try . . . I think you'll be pleasantly surprised. I'm looking forward to book two in the series. It will contain the story of Eli Brenneman from Promise to Return, as he serves in the CPS at a mental asylum. Sounds like another unique book in this genre!

I received a copy of this book to facilitate my review.

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### **Lisa Johnson says**

Title: Promise to Return (Promise of Sunrise)

Author: Elizabeth Byler Younts

Pages: 320

Year: 2013

Publisher: Howard Books

Lately one of my least favorite genres has been Amish books because they seem so prevalent or marketed as something other worldly like. What do I mean? For instance, one novel I was to review lacked depth, authenticity, and most of all a plot. Sometimes too the Amish and their lifestyle are highlighted as better than what others live or more along the fantasy type genre.

However, I am so glad to have read Promise to Return for here is an author who was raised and lived the Amish lifestyle. Through the novel her aim to enlighten readers as to what possibly may have been experienced by some Amish communities during World War II. Elizabeth Byler Younts writes with more than her knowledge or experience; her heart is clearly present on every page throughout the book.

Here is a story with characters that have depth of heart, emotions and life happenings that grip the heart of the reader; drawing them into the perspective of the main female character named Miriam and the male lead Henry. As I read the story, I became aware of how lifelike Amish communities can be, which is not as they are sometimes presented. They are people who experience joy, pain, sorrow, laugh, cry and make choices as to Who is leading their life just as those who aren't Amish do.

I was reminded of the price servicemen and women pay, and perhaps more so the families during WW II. We are used to instant everything today and waiting seems like a major inconvenience and frustration. Back in the 1940's, the time between seeing a soldier off to war and hearing anything from them varied and when no word was received, that had to be one of the most heart wrenching experiences our past generation suffered! So, perhaps as you read this fictional story you might be reminded as I was that the cost of the freedoms we enjoy or abuse today came at costs we may never really understand.

I cannot wait for the sequel to Promise to Return, which focuses on a different character from this first novel. Just know that this is one author to read, follow and know that she is open to engaging with anyone who desires to know more about the Amish or her own life by contacting her at [www.elizabethbyleryounts.com](http://www.elizabethbyleryounts.com) or <http://notquiteamishliving.com/>

My rating is 5+ stars!

Disclosure of Material Connection: I received one or more of the products or services mentioned above for free in the hope that I would mention it on my blog. Regardless, I only recommend products or services I use personally and believe will be good for my readers. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade

Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255. "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

Other reviews can be read at <http://seekingwithallyourheart.blogspot.com> . Also follow me on Twitter @lcjohnson1988, FaceBook at <https://www.facebook.com/lisa.johnson...>

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### **Maureen Timerman says**

This was a different kind of Amish book whereas it took place during WW II. Written by a new author who happened to have grown up Amish, this story gave more insight into areas of Amish rules and culture than I had ever read before. In fact, I wonder if my father, who served in WW II, had even heard of Amish back then. Anyway, the characters, Henry and Miriam, were about to visit the bishop to begin planning their wedding when Henry got drafted. Being Amish and a conscientious objector, he went to a work camp to serve out his time. But even though that was all that was required of him, he told Miriam that God had spoken to him and led him to enlist. Miriam now struggled, for most of the rest of the book, with a decision to follow her Amish faith and culture, or to choose to love and follow Henry. I really enjoyed this book at first. Then it started to drag with what felt like unnecessary information. But soon it picked up again and I wanted to read all night. It is such a different Amish book, but so historically and culturally interesting. I do recommend this book.

I received this book through Howard Books, and was not required to give a positive review.

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### **Carrie Pagels says**

Authentic Amish voice from a young woman who is from an Amish background. This is Elizabeth's second novel, her first self-published to much success, with good reason--she's an amazing writer. Tightly woven novel about the consequences of a young man's decision to obey God's voice rather than go by all the Amish rules and the impact on his fiancé, also. Lots of bibliotherapy options here. There are family deaths, injuries some major, separation, isolation and yet knowing that one special love is truly meant to be. And she delivers a tender HEA that will have you begging for her next novel.

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### **Gayle Pace says**

#### **REVIEW:**

This book PROMISE TO RETURN takes a look into the lives of Amish families that have been torn apart by World War II. Two young Amish people have told of their intention to wed. The wedding was to be put on hold since Henry Mast is drafted. Miriam Coblenz is left to deal with Henry's best friend, Eli is doing his best to get her affection. Henry decides he wants to go and fight, not just work in the war effort. Miriam is deeply hurt. Henry could be shunned since this is against the Amish order. Miriam has a choice, not an easy one but she can stay with Henry and be shunned too or she can go with Eli who she doesn't love. With Eli she could have the life she has always wanted. She is struggling between what's right and what's wrong. She seeks God's wisdom. What does God want Miriam to do? She has to decide. I found myself wanting the two

to be together so bad, but Miriam must decide between the Church and the man she loves. The author has written with such vivid detail, that you feel the characters emotions. It will bring a tear to your eye. The Amish have some of the same struggles and trying times that we do. I would recommend this book to everyone. Amish reads always seem to warm the heart. Yes there are times when there is a tear or two. They are good, clean, interesting and entertaining reads. So grab yourself a copy and help Miriam decide between her love for Henry or her love for God? The author didn't fail to give us a great Amish read that is good for the mind as well as the heart. Thank you Ms. Younts.

I would give this book 5 STARS.

I was given a complimentary ARC of PROMISE TO RETURN from the author, Elizabeth Byler Younts for this unbiased review.

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