

Book Review

Crossfire, Jeanette Windle, Kregel Publications, 617 pages, \$14.99

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

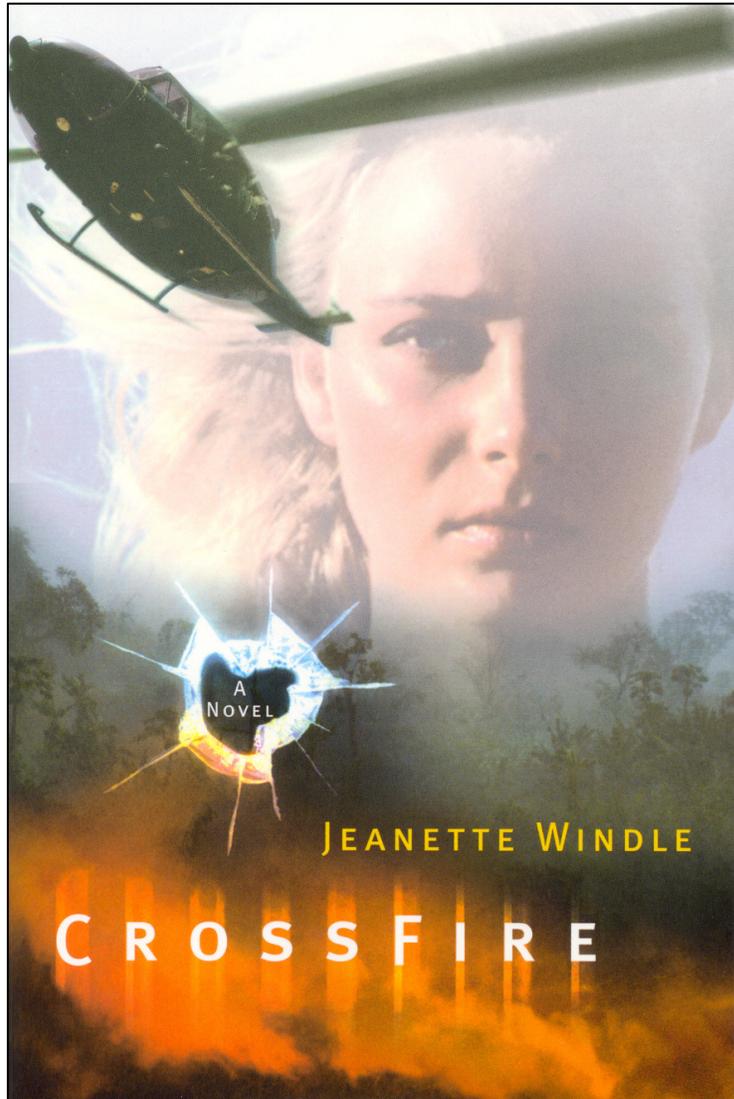
That a Christian missionary would write an international intrigue novel focusing on *narcotraficantes* in Bolivia might seem a little unusual. But who would know the ins and outs of Latin America and its problems better than one who grew up in Colombia and spent the last fifteen years in Bolivia?

Miami resident Jeanette Windle has used her extensive knowledge and insights to pen a compelling novel of intrigue, adventure, romance and reflection that is as relevant and realistic as today's drug wars in South America. *Crossfire* is the latest of the growing genre of Christian fiction that is appealing to non-Christian readers who enjoy a well-spun story that explores some spiritual issues.

After a whirlwind one-month romance, Sara Cortez finds herself inserted into the upper class life style of her new husband's wealthy family in Santa Cruz, Bolivia. The transition is difficult in that not only is the culture of her in-laws foreign to her, but so are their elitist ways, business procedures and lack of social consciousness, especially toward the poor, indigenous people of the country.

Sara puts up a game front, not the least because husband Nicolás is so downright good looking and caring. A continual round of parties and social contacts serves to introduce Sara to the community's movers and shakers and also to many in the expatriate community. In particular she encounters Doug Bradford, a widower DEA agent who is despised by Nicolás because of a raid on the family business several years back that uncovered nothing but embarrassed the family's reputation in the country. Yet the man appears much more humane and caring than her husband led her to believe.

Several months of the social swirl leave Sara bored and restless to be involved in something more significant than the constant round of parties and social teas. Through contacts at the local English language church, she begins work at an orphanage. However, the wider her contacts unsupervised by the family, the more she begins to question the large gap between Bolivia's rich and poor and the more conscious she



becomes of the pervasive nature of drug trafficking on the part of the majority of the community's elite, possibly including her new family.

An encounter with Doug Bradford at a church social event helps her to understand that DEA activities are aimed at eradicating the trafficking, not harassing law-abiding citizens and that the agent is not necessarily the ogre her husband and father-in-law portray him to be. As a matter of fact, she discovers that he is a pretty decent guy and a man of faith as well.

An incident during a tour of the family's sprawling enterprise and other observations begin raise the suspicion in Sara's mind that perhaps even her new family is, or at best, was, involved in cocaine trafficking. How else would a family, once quite wealthy but reduced to selling their grand mansion and many of their assets after the collapse of the tin-mining business that sustained so much of Bolivia, have suddenly become so wealthy as to own one of the largest conglomerates in the country?

Not so, husband Nicky assures her, but his frequent absences on business trips with his father, a host of unanswered questions and the presence of a rather unsavory security chief at the family properties lead Sara to conclude that she is in the middle of something from which she cannot extricate herself.

As the situation rapidly deteriorates and Sara realizes that her own life is in danger, she flees, uncertain who to turn to. In a city where her family has so much influence over the media, police and government, and where as a young, blonde foreigner, and the daughter-in-law of the most prominent family in town, she is immediately recognizable, who can she turn to with what she knows, and what will the consequences be?

Throughout the story, the author introduces several reflective themes that will be of interest to the thoughtful reader. The question of how the U.S. involvement in a drug war in Latin America jives with American government support of tobacco manufacturers who distribute their lethal produce overseas, the consciousness of the wide socio-economic gap between rich and poor in Latin America and the struggle of the central character to come to terms with her relationship to God are all thoughtfully presented.

Jeannette Windle, who is working on her second novel set in the FARC-controlled demilitarized zone of Colombia, has painted a very realistic picture of life in many South American cities and the social struggles that occur between different sectors of Latin American society. Anyone who has lived in the Andean region will immediately appreciate her knowledge and experience as well as the touch of reality that she has included in her dramatic story. Even those unfamiliar with the region will enjoy this well-crafted story that holds the reader to the end.

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