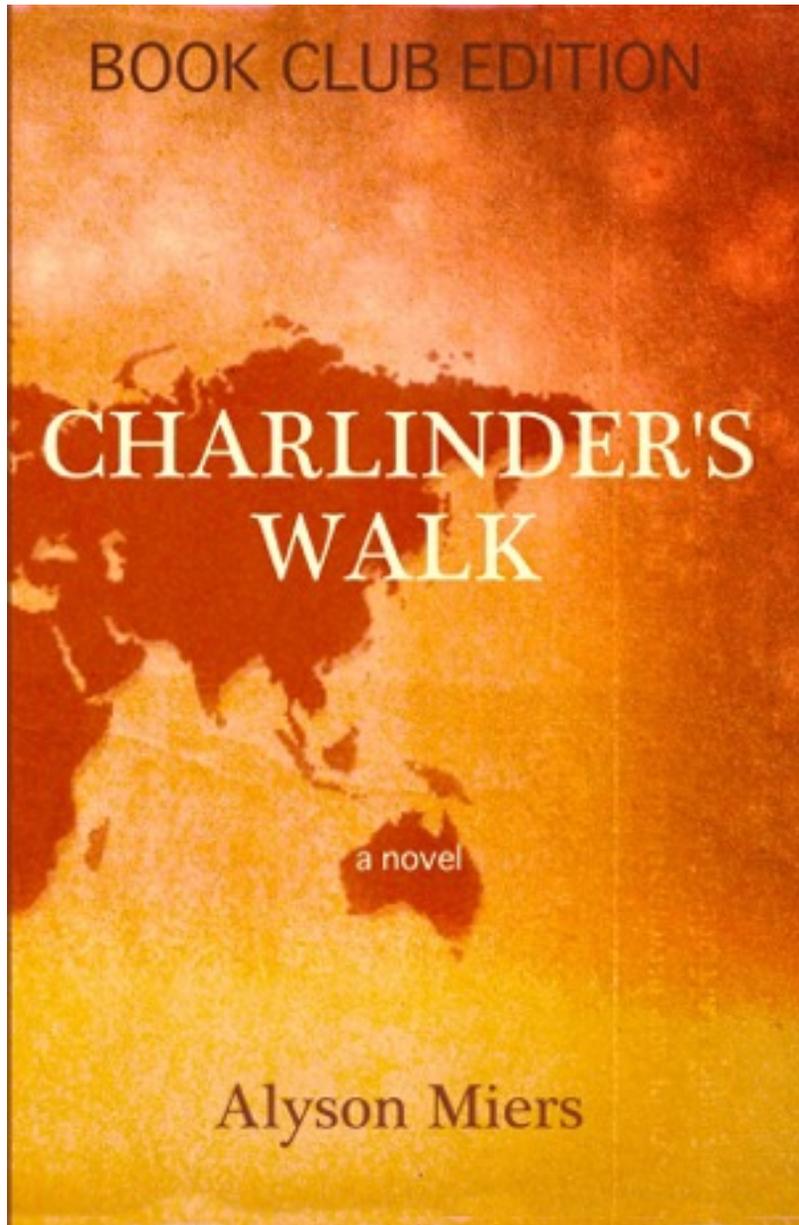


**Charlinder's Walk (Media Kit)**



# Summary

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In 2012, the Plague brought about the end of the world. In 2130, Charlinder wants to know why when his village begins to fight over the Plague's origin. Was it a natural event, or did God punish humanity for its sins?

Unwilling to wait for matters to get any worse, and never having been more than ten miles from home, he decides to walk across three continents to find the site of the Plague's origin and bring the true story home.

In the two and a half years it takes him to get there, he learns how shocking his village's culture seems to outsiders while the settlements along the way force him to grapple with questions of family, religion, education, sexuality, hierarchy and interdependence. He survives thousands of miles of language barriers, hunger and disaster before he meets Gentiola.

Nothing could have prepared him for the tale of madness, ecology and fanaticism that he learns from her. His place in the world is a question he will ask for the first time.

“Charlinder’s Walk was a fantastic read and one I enjoyed immensely. Alyson Miers did an excellent job in terms of character development. I really liked the whole cast of them because they seemed to jump off the page, the whole story did for me actually jumped off the page and I really felt as though I was there with Charlinder as he was on his journey of self discovery.” — from Kimberly at [Turning the Pages](#)

# Setting

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## *Prologue: The Plague*

### **Spread**

The Plague of 2010 began in northern Italy and spread rapidly to the south. Just as the first Italian victims were buried, more cases began to appear in other countries, especially in Western Europe and North America. As the World Health Organization promised they would soon be able to contain the disease, the medical community desperately tried to determine how such a new disease could spread so far in so little time. Just after the contagion debates began, a number of businesses appeared, selling herbal drugs that promised to prevent the virus, and were immediately deluged with orders. That was when Eileen Woodlawn, watching the pandemic unfold from the U.S., began to stockpile food.

### **Symptoms**

The virus was entirely airborne in its transmission. The damage started in the digestive system. The first symptom was a spell of diarrhea that eventually turned bloody, straining the immune system and leaving the body malnourished. When finished with the intestines, the virus then attacked the kidneys, until it caused renal poisoning and internal hemorrhaging. Any patient who survived that stage soon experienced liver failure, with the toxicity that came with it, followed by even more internal hemorrhaging, until the virus perforated the heart. It soon became apparent that anyone who presented with the telltale bloody diarrhea was going to die within a few months. Most people didn't survive the kidney stage. The first to present with symptoms in Western Europe and the American continents were transplant recipients, cancer and AIDS patients, and other people with compromised immune systems, but thousands of cases in previously

## Charlinder's Walk (Media Kit)

healthy people immediately sprang up. Schools, hospitals and prisons became conduits for infection.

### Breakdown

As more people died, services disappeared and life became more chaotic. American health authorities made a few attempts at quarantining Plague patients. The endeavor killed a number of healthcare workers while new cases proliferated outside. The radio told of nothing except the mounting death toll. The herbal drugs promising to protect against the Plague had no demonstrated effects except to cause liver failure. Nearly all doctors and nurses caught the Plague from their patients and died, which meant that people with other medical problems didn't get the care they needed. People who had lost their jobs but not yet fallen ill took to looting stores, while there weren't enough police left to attempt any control. Briefly after Eileen barricaded herself in her house, about a year after the first victims were reported, a neighboring state attempted a reverse quarantine program in which they isolated healthy people to protect them from the virus. The project was unsuccessful. The disease was slower to reach the more remote parts of the world, but no country avoided the pandemic. Cults sprang up around the idea of a special place in Heaven for people who escaped the Plague, which led many healthy young people to commit mass suicides.

When the last victims died in May of 2012, only 0.0125% of the world population remained. Electricity, running water, gas pipelines and mass communication were no longer functional. Large cities were the most thoroughly devastated, while rural areas had the highest percent survival. Farmers had been the last to go. The survivors had nothing left except land. It was in this environment that 20 survivors, including Eileen, founded the village of Paleola.

## *Chapter 1: Paleola*

Eileen knew about an old farm located along the Paleola River, and when the Plague pandemic was finished, she brought her fellow survivors there and they made it their new home. By the year 2130, there are over 150 people living in that community, and they get along with the neighboring villages also settled along the river following the Plague, but they are known for being a strange bunch of people. Their neighbors think the Paleolans are rather odd because, for example, they do not raise livestock for slaughter. They have chickens for eggs, sheep for wool and milk, horses for work, and when they want meat, they shoot it in the woods or catch it from the river. Even worse, they have no tradition of lifelong marriage; instead they form avuncular families. About a third of Paleolans are properly religious like their neighbors while the majority are uninterested in the divine. What makes Paleolans strangest of all in the post-Plague era is that they are literate. Eileen insisted that the survivors' children should learn how to read and write, and she became the community's first teacher. She was also the only one of the original community who put her experiences on paper. In 2130, the school is still running with Charlinder as its teacher, and Eileen is his connection to the pre-Plague world.

The author takes the reader on an atypical journey through a genre that has become even more popular as of late. It would have been easy to make the story about the journey itself, the hardships of walking such a great distance, but she chooses to make the story about the people and the societies that Charlinder meets on his quest to discover the great truth that has plagued his village since its founding.

–Eric Swett at [My Writer's Cramp](#)

# Dramatis Personae

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## *2012: Plague Survivors*

### **Eileen Woodlawn**

Eileen Woodlawn locked herself in her basement a year into the Plague pandemic with a stockpile of food and water and stayed inside until she knew the pandemic was done. When she went outside, fellow survivors Mark and Jose were the first to find her. She spent a great deal of time over the next fourteen years sparring with Mark over the origin of the Plague. The means to which she knew the pandemic was over, at the same time as the other survivors did, remained a matter of controversy. According to Charlinder, her personality can be summed up as: bright, courageous, hard-working and supportive, as well as stubborn, self-righteous, tactless and more than a trifle arrogant.

### **Mark**

Mark was a retired fireman whose avoidance of Plague infection can only be attributed to an absurdly strong constitution. Towards the end of the pandemic, he met Jose and, despite their not having a language in common, stuck with him until they met Eileen and other survivors. After they settled the farm on the Paleola River, Mark seized opportunities to argue with Eileen about what started the Plague and what that meant for the survivors' future. Eileen referred to him in her diary as "the old man" and called him a jackass to his face.

### **Jose**

Jose was a carpenter of Salvadoran origin who lived in the same town as Mark and Eileen. After they settled the Paleola farm, Jose taught his woodworking skills to the other men while Eileen and Marissa taught him English.

### **Marissa**

Marissa dropped out of high school in her freshman year when the first of her classmates fell ill and over the next two years, all her family died while she managed to stay alive. She became just like a little sister to Eileen.

### **Laura**

Laura was an ordained minister before the Plague killed all her family and congregation. She was in the original twenty survivors who settled the Paleola farm, and once there, she took on the entirely thankless role of attempting to mediate between Mark and Eileen. She briefly took over teaching the village's children when Eileen was unable to run the schoolhouse.

### *2130: Plague Descendants* **Charlinder**

Charlinder was born in 2110 and became the new schoolteacher of Paleola at eighteen. His mother, Lydia, didn't have any more children, which is highly unusual for a post-Plague family. Since she didn't have any daughters, she taught Charlinder how to spin and knit when he was around seven years old so that he wouldn't need her to make his clothes as an adult. As a result, Charlinder bonded

## **Charlinder's Walk (Media Kit)**

with several girls around his age and as a young adult would much rather join them at Spinners' Square than join the other young men at hunting. Since Lydia died when he was seventeen, he lives alone with her older half-brother, Roy. Because he has no siblings in a community with avuncular families, he has no expectation of becoming a family man like his uncle. When his neighbors begin fighting over the origin of the Plague more than usual, Charlinder considers it part of his responsibilities as a teacher to find out the truth. According to his Anima, he is intelligent, honest, caring and driven. Also, oversensitive, single-minded, more than a little arrogant and comically naive.

### **Roy**

He is Charlinder's only remaining family member in 2130, and the first person to hear his nephew's plan to walk to the site of the Plague pandemic's beginning.

### **Miriam**

She has been a sort of mother-figure to Charlinder since Lydia died, in fact she acts like a mom to everyone in Paleola who seems abandoned, bereaved, neglected or wayward. She is on the village council and runs Spinners' Square with an iron fist. When Charlinder announces his plan to learn about the Plague's cause, she takes a rather dim view of his chances at success.

### **Sunny**

She oozes Essence of Raging Bitch from every pore, but she's *their* raging bitch.

## **Meredith**

Sweet, helpful and inquisitive.

## **Yolande**

She's a frequently irritated young mother who adores her toddling son, Stuart and is regularly seen sparring with her brother, Bruce and fending off the attentions of her paramour, Kenny.

## **Nadine**

Friendly, seems unsophisticated, yet deceptively observant.

## **Phoebe**

Loyal, steady, easily amused.

## **Bruce**

The other young people call him Brucie, though never to his face. He's Yolande's brother and annoys her by trying to convince her to come with him to the Sermons.

## **Charlinder's Walk (Media Kit)**

### **Kenny**

He takes a break from being the goofy guy around the village to complain to Charlinder that Brucie is trying to keep him away from Yolande and Stuart.

### **Ruth**

Robert's sister; has the dubious distinction of getting kicked out of Spinners' Square by Miriam. She reminds Charlinder that Eileen Woodlawn was never able to explain how she knew when it was safe to come outside.

### **Robert**

Ruth's brother; successfully shocks Charlinder by asking to share the Faithful theory of the Plague pandemic to the schoolchildren.

### **Darrell**

He is the village medic as of 2130 and one of the oldest people in the village. He convinces Miriam that Charlinder's journey is a necessary endeavor, though Charlinder still finds it rather irritating that Miriam is willing to listen to Darrell and not him.

*2133*

## **Gentiola**

She was born in Elbasan, Albania in the 20th century and moved to Florence, Italy for university, where she met friends who taught her skills that precious few people have. It was due to these abilities, though not within her control, that Gentiola lived through the Plague pandemic and in fact stopped aging altogether by 2012. Charlinder meets her in the countryside near what used to be Bologna, and she is absolutely thrilled to have a foreigner at her house. While previously he had no connection to the 20th and early 21st centuries except for Eileen's journals, now he has Gentiola alive and well to tell him about the world before the Plague.

# Sample

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## Introduction

When the last victims of the Plague died in 2012, Eileen Woodlawn was one of five people left alive from a town of forty-thousand. They joined fifteen more survivors on the walk to the Paleola River where they salvaged a farm. With too few people left to run a power plant, maintain the water supply or the gas lines, or much of anything else from their former lives, they had nothing left to use except arable land.

Whether Eileen was the most important of the survivors who founded Paleola is arguable. She taught her fellows a number of skills they needed to live in the post-Plague world, but most of all she wrote everything down. Eileen lost so much in the Plague that she never felt like a survivor so much as one of the left-behind, but when Charlinder was born almost a century later, her writings were his only connection to the pre-Plague world.

The village held around 150 people by 2130. Along the river were other survivor settlements who got along well enough with the Paleolans but also knew them as “a bunch of heathens” and “those libertines.”

The biggest difference in reality between the Paleolans and other communities was that the Paleolans all knew how to read and write.

The school, where all the village’s children spent their mornings at lessons, was there because she convinced her community that their descendants needed to be literate, and she was their first teacher. In 2130, teaching at that school was Charlinder’s job. Paleola is where Charlinder grew up, but where he became an adult is another story.

## **Chapter 1**

In Charlinder's opinion, there was no better place to be on a sunny afternoon in March than Spinners' Square. This meant he was regarded as the odd duck of the village.

They were too far north to grow cotton, but not too far north for corn, and the winters were cold but not long; the land was set on hills but not far above sea level. When the weather turned warm enough that one could sit outside and still relax, his favorite place to go after the close of the school day was the square in front of the kitchen house. He had recently turned twenty and was in the middle of his second year of teaching. Once he had straightened up the schoolroom and prepped for the next day's lessons, he would go into the shed behind the kitchen, take a spinning wheel on one shoulder and a stool in the other hand, and join his best friends in the square. Since Charlinder's mother, Lydia, had taught him to spin, knit and weave before he was old enough to know any better, this was where he liked to be. At one end of the row was Sunny; small and sturdy with unruly hair and thick eyebrows. There was Meredith, with her sharp chin and almond-shaped eyes; there was Nadine, tall with a long narrow face and hazel eyes. Yolande and Phoebe were somewhere else, but on another afternoon they would be at the square. These were Charlinder's friends; they had all been thick as thieves since before they lost their baby teeth. At the other end was Miriam, hawk-faced and graying, who was the closest thing he had to a mother since Lydia had died three years before. He set down the wheel, perched his lanky frame on the stool, and joined the women in making enough yarn to keep the village clothed. As they passed by the square, the other young men frequently looked at Charlinder as if he were an oddity they needed to figure out. The way they regarded him was like looking at a runty newborn animal and trying to decide whether to feed it by hand or kill it. The way Charlinder saw it, the joke was on them.

"Do any of you think we should plant more flax?" asked Meredith partway through the afternoon.

## Charlinder's Walk (Media Kit)

"I'd rather go naked in the winter," answered Sunny.

"We talked about this at the last council meeting," said Miriam, "and we decided we have enough planted to cover our needs."

"But we could trade it with the other farms," said Meredith.

"The other farms don't want it unless we prepare it for them," Miriam explained, while Sunny shuddered out loud. "And we're not doing that because they can't trade us enough for our labor. If they wanted more linen, they'd plant more flax themselves."

"What else did you talk about at the last council meeting?" asked Charlinder, who was just as ignorant as all the other young people of what the leaders discussed.

"It's funny you should ask about that, Char," said Miriam. "Some of them asked about you. They asked me if it's a good idea for you to be over here so much, rather than working with the other guys," Miriam explained, while the younger women snickered.

"Why, what's the problem?" he asked.

"They're worried about how the little boys might take it, like they'll get confused or something, about what they're supposed to do," she elaborated, over more snickering.

"And what did you say?" Charlinder asked.

"I told them that if these boys' uncles can't teach them how to think for themselves, then you can teach them it's okay if they don't want to be fertilizer," she finished. Charlinder laughed under his breath while Meredith, Sunny and Nadine cackled out loud.

The threat of "fertilizer" was a code word that meant someone needed to find something useful to do. It was shorthand for "get off your backside and get to

## Charlinder's Walk (Media Kit)

work,” the implication being that otherwise, you might as well be turned to fertilizer.

“So I guess they won’t forbid me from teaching the children any time soon,” said Charlinder.

“No one was ever asking to make you stop teaching, Char, only to stop spinning and weaving,” Miriam assured him.

“Yeah, I don’t see anyone else lining up to be the schoolteacher, anyway,” Nadine said.

“Because heaven forbid a guy should do anything productive in this place,” remarked Miriam.

Charlinder bristled at this comment. “My uncle caught us a whole net full of fish this morning, and he just fixed the cracks in the hen house,” he said.

“Of course we know Roy works hard,” said Sunny. “None of us deny that.”

“And he’s not on the village council, either,” said Miriam, then got a curious look on her face. “Has he ever considered that, Char?” she asked. “Would your uncle like to be on the council?”

“I don’t think administration would appeal to him,” said Charlinder, shaking his head.

“Maybe that’s why we need him,” said Meredith.

“No, we don’t need anyone else on the council,” said Sunny. “We just need a really ugly winter this year to scare everyone into working. You know how my—“

“No, Sunny!” Meredith interrupted, before Sunny could go off on one of her anecdotes to show how badly she lived up to her name. “Don’t go there.”

“How many people do you want to freeze this year?” asked Nadine. “Or do you want them to starve?”

## Charlinder's Walk (Media Kit)

“I don’t want anyone to die,” Sunny insisted. “Only get off their asses instead of waiting for the rest of us to keep them fed and clothed just because we’re such nice people or something. Because, the way we supposedly get things done is ‘Everyone works, everyone eats’ and everyone is responsible for everyone else, right? But it’s the ‘everyone works’ part that sometimes gets lost.”

“Every time we have a ‘really ugly winter,’ we have to bury a few people by the end of it, and they’re usually very small,” said Miriam, and that was the end of that.

Overall it was a fine day to spend spinning a yarn while the sun shone through the still-bare trees, but after some time they ran out of things to talk about and the square became too quiet. It was a good time for Yolande to come storming in with a look of trying to avoid someone. She had an oval face, slightly bent nose, and wavy hair she kept tied up to the back of her head to keep her toddler’s hands out. She showed up with a basket of peas in her arms and her two-year-old son, Stuart, at her heels.

“What’s the matter?” asked Nadine, noting Yolande’s harried expression as she plopped down on the grass and began shelling the peas into her apron.

“Kenny is the matter,” she said, glancing off in the direction from which she’d come.

“How is he bothering you this time?” asked Miriam.

“He wants me to knit him a sweater, and he’s been pestering me for days,” answered Yolande.

Charlinder found that Yolande was frequently in this kind of mood with Kenny. Miriam had asked her, and she had confirmed, that Kenny was probably Stuart’s father, and it was a wide-open secret that she was still taking him behind the smokehouse on a regular basis regardless of what her brother thought. She could often be seen gnashing her teeth in Kenny’s direction, and while Charlinder did not doubt that her annoyance was genuine, he also got the impression that she did not really want their arguments to stop any time soon.

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“I take it you don’t want to knit for him,” said Charlinder.

“For that big a job, he’s out of his mind,” Yolande replied, while Stuart tugged on her top and whined, “Mama...”

“Yes, baby, I hear you,” Yolande cooed. She untied her apron and laid it on the ground, made Stuart sit down by her left hip, and lifted the hem of her top to let him latch on and nurse. She resumed shelling peas one-handed. “And I keep telling him I’m not going to do it for what he’s offering in return, but he keeps trying to bargain and beg off me.”

“You know he doesn’t seriously expect you to do that for him,” said Miriam. “He just wants your attention.”

“Oh, of course,” Yolande answered. “I just feel like I’m surrounded by stupid men these days,” she grumbled. “But I don’t mean you, Char,” she said.

“I know,” he replied.

“What’s Bruce doing this time?” asked Meredith, referring to Yolande’s brother.

“He keeps going on about how we should always have faith in God and He’ll show us the way, and all that sheep-crap. Like, last night, he wanted me to go to the fricking Sermon with him. I had to throw my spindle at him before he’d leave me alone.”

A sympathetic groan went up around the circle. While Charlinder was the most assured unbeliever of all of them, none of his friends were particularly Faithful. Miriam sometimes attended the bonfire Sermons because, being on the village council, she felt she needed to keep track of what went on, but she complained that the Sermons always either annoyed her or put her to sleep. Sunny attended sometimes and found the Sermons amusing, though Charlinder still didn’t understand why. Meredith went once or twice a month; she said she was curious about what the Faithful were saying. She also liked having

## Charlinder's Walk (Media Kit)

somewhere to go after dark. For the most part, any discussion involving God was one they could take or leave.

“I went,” offered Sunny. “You didn’t miss anything. They’re back to their old standby.”

“Which old standby is that?” asked Charlinder.

“It’s the freaking Plague again,” she said with a tone of describing something pathetic.

“I’m glad I gave it a miss,” said Nadine.

“You’re just lucky you can give it a miss,” said Yolande.

“There you are!” said another voice. It was Kenny, looking very happy to see Yolande. Contrary to her hopes that her sitting in the middle of several spinning wheels would scare him off, he flopped down on the grass next to her. “I was wondering where you went,” he said happily, jiggling Stuart’s foot.

“Leave him alone, he’s eating,” snapped Yolande, swatting Kenny’s hand away.

“Sorry, I was just making conversation,” he said.

“I already told you, I’m not knitting any sweaters,” Yolande began.

“But I’ll make you a new set of needles!” Kenny offered. “Hey, I’ll even make them before you start on the sweater.”

“I could teach you to knit, and then you wouldn’t need me to do it for you,” Yolande offered, in the tone of having been in this conversation too long already.

“Come on, I can’t knit, I’m a guy.”

“That doesn’t stop Char.”

“Yeah, but he’s Char,” Kenny replied. Charlinder almost wanted to ask him what exactly that was supposed to mean. “What’s the problem, why are you being so stubborn?”

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“I want a new set of bone needles, and a new tripod stool,” said Yolande. “Or better yet, you could ask your mother!”

“My mom’s got three of us,” Kenny complained.

“And I’ve got Bruce and Stuey.”

“But Stuey’s really small.”

“And you are not my son, so if you don’t wanna do me any woodworking, you can take your bone needles and—“

“You two can find something else to talk about or go somewhere else,” said Miriam. Yolande looked accordingly subdued.

“So, Char, what did I miss? Was ‘Lande just telling you all what an idiot I am?”

“Don’t flatter yourself, we weren’t talking about you,” said Yolande.

Sunny shared a conspiratorial eye-roll with Charlinder, then moved on. “Right, we were talking about the Sermon last night.”

“I didn’t go,” said Kenny. “Why, what did they tell us this time?”

“All about how God loved our ancestors so much He brought them the Plague,” she explained.

“That old compost again? Does anyone listen to them?”

“Some people do, actually,” Miriam answered. “Do you think they’re right?”

“No, why would I?” said Kenny. “Sometimes diseases just happen, you know? Like storms and droughts.”

“Then if you ask the Sermon-preachers, they’ll probably say God makes the weather to punish and reward us,” said Sunny.

“I guess that means we’re bad every winter,” joked Nadine.

## **Charlinder's Walk (Media Kit)**

Charlinder's Walk is a book that makes the reader consider important issues and reflect. Miers' detail and use of description are excellent. Her writing is attentive and draws readers into the world she created.

—Kristin at [Live to Read](#)

## About the Author

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Alyson Miers was born into a family of compulsive readers and thought it would be fun to get on the other side of the words. She attended Salisbury University, where she majored in English Creative Writing for some reason, and minored in Gender Studies. In 2006, she did the only thing a 25-year-old with a B.A. in English can do to pay the rent: joined the Peace Corps. At her assignment of teaching English in Albania, she learned the joys of culture shock, language barriers and being the only foreigner on the street, and got Charlinder off the ground. She brought home a completed first draft in 2008 and, between doing a lot of other stuff such as writing two other books, she managed to ready it for publication in 2011. She regularly shoots her mouth off at her blog when she isn't writing fiction or holding down her day job. She lives in Maryland with her computer and a lot of yarn.



Podcast at [New Books in Secularism](#).

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