



Philip Gulley

Christmas in Harmony
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When I began writing, I confined myself to the essay. I liked its brevity and simplicity. Five hundred words, no plot, no character development, just my thoughts put to paper. That worked well for three books, then I ran out of things to say. Plus, I'd moved back to my hometown and doubted the wisdom of writing about people I saw every day. The move back home seemed like a good time to start writing fiction.

While reading the Bible, I came across a line written by St. Paul exhorting the early Christians to "live in harmony with one another." I was taken with the word *harmony* and began thinking how fun it would be to write about a town named Harmony that was anything but. Thus, the Harmony series was born with my first work of fiction, *Home to Harmony*. No sooner had the series been launched than I was fired by my Christian publisher for theological reason. They asked me what I believed and I made the mistake of telling them I believed God loved everyone, not just Christians. I had no sooner settled into the restful life of unemployment than HarperSanFrancisco approached me about publishing my

books and the Harmony series was given new life. The town of Harmony is very loosely based on the Indiana town where I have lived much of my life. The main characters are Sam Gardner, the pastor of the Harmony Friends Meeting. Dale Hinshaw is the resident fundamentalist with a knack for irritating everyone who knows him. He is balanced by Miriam Hodge, a progressive, thoughtful woman who exemplifies many of the Quaker women I know. Fern Hampton is the head of the Friendly Women's Circle, a marginally tamer version of the Mafia. The stunning Deena Morrison owns and operates the Legal Grounds Coffee Shop, while Vinny and Penny Toricelli preside over the Coffee Cup Restaurant. Cable television isn't available, so folks get their news from *The Harmony Herald* newspaper, published by Bob Miles, who also writes his flagship column, "The Bobservation Post" every Tuesday. As the series has grown in popularity, I've been invited to speak at various places around the country. While response to the series has been gratifying, it's been a bit difficult juggling the various demands. My preference is always to stay home, eat lunch at Frank's Place on the town square, putter in the workshop with my boys and listen to my wife read them *Trumpet of the Swan* at night in the big chair next to the woodstove in the kitchen. I get interesting letters from people who've read the Harmony books. Some people like it when I'm funny, others like it when I'm serious. I used to try to accommodate my reader's opinions and tailor my writing to suit them. Now I've given up on the illusion that I can please everyone, and just write what I want. Nevertheless, I hope you'll enjoy my books. If you don't, please keep it to yourself.