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Amish Memoirist Tells of How Love Helped Her Leave Her Strict Religious Community for Good

Author Saloma Miller Furlong Will Be Featured on PBS *American Experience* February 4

In her first volume of memoir, *Why I Left the Amish*, Saloma Miller Furlong told of growing up in a strict Amish community, with a violent, mentally ill father and a sexually abusive brother, and fleeing to a new life in Vermont. Her new book, *Bonnet Strings: An Amish Woman's Ties to Two Worlds* (Herald Press, \$15.99 paper, February 3, 2014), recounts how she was coerced to return, but was able to make the break for good thanks to the love of the "Yankee" (non-Amish) man she would eventually marry. Saloma, who told her story in the PBS *American Experience* program, "The Amish," will again be featured by the documentary series in a new film, "The Amish: Shunned," airing on February 4, 2014.

Bonnet Strings continues the story of a woman torn between the Amish community where she was born and raised, and the Vermont world where she experienced freedom for the first time. At age twenty, Saloma began a new life as "Linda." She worked as a waitress, landing her "dream job" at Pizza Hut, made plans to attend college, and began dating a toymaker.

As Saloma wrote in her first book, "there are two ways to leave the Amish—one is through life and the other through death. To leave through life, one has to deliberately walk away." Walking away is not as easy as it sounds. Vanloads of Amish drove out to Vermont, pressuring her to return to the fold in Ohio.

The second time an Amish group—including the bishop—showed up, "I felt the weight of the deep and abiding traditions of my ancestors on my shoulders," Saloma says. She capitulated, returning home with them. Thus began more than two years of trying to "make myself Amish again." Born with a nature that did not fit into Amish culture, she was labeled stubborn and rebellious. "It was a mismatch from the start," she says.

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Her ties to the outside world remained, through the quiet perseverance of the toymaker from Vermont, David Furlong. *Bonnet Strings* is a testament to the power of love, as David never gave up his quest to continue their romance. He pursued her through cards, letters, phone calls, and visits, never giving up hope that their love could survive the strain of living in two different worlds. David contributed a few short chapters to the book so that his voice and experience are woven through it.

Bonnet Strings is a love story, but also “a universal story of choosing between our need for community and belonging and our desire for freedom to walk the path that is most authentic to who we are,” says Saloma.

The book ends with a beginning: Saloma and David’s wedding on May 29, 1982. “The joy of having overcome the cultural barriers and impossibilities of our relationship was overwhelming,” Saloma says. “I was no longer torn between two worlds—this was my last step out of the Amish community and into my new one.

Saloma and David have two adult sons. She graduated from Smith College in May 2007 with a major in German Studies and a minor in Philosophy. While she was at Smith, she completed an internship with noted Amish expert Dr. Donald Kraybill at Elizabethtown College. During her thirty-year struggle of coming to terms with her Amish past, Furlong has gleaned a better understanding of herself and of her heritage.

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