

Like author father,

A script off the old block

Alison Strobel finds writing rewarding

By John W. Kennedy

Novelist Alison Strobel never felt pressure from her father, journalist and author Lee Strobel, to conform to his writing style. Well, there was that one time in sixth grade.

“I knew she was a good writer,” Lee recalls. “I pushed her and her friends into starting a neighborhood newspaper because that’s what I did at that age. The only problem was she didn’t want to do that kind of writing.”

Lee stopped giving advice that didn’t work. Alison wanted to write fiction and her first novel, *Worlds Collide*, has received favorable reviews since its March release. Lee is perhaps best known as the author of *The Case for Christ: A Journalist’s Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus*. His 1998 book describing his conversion from atheism has sold 1.5 million copies and been translated into nine languages.

Alison started writing stories in first grade — just like her dad. Early on, Lee recognized his daughter’s love of words and he determined to offer both opportunity and encouragement.

Lee and his wife, Leslie, read a lot of books to Alison in her early childhood years. Soon after she could read on her own Alison obtained a library card. During summers she spent up to five hours a day reading books at the Arlington Heights, Ill., library.

In addition, Lee provided positive feedback about his daughter’s writing. He remembered his own mother editing the grammar on one of his first-grade storybooks. Although his mother wanted him to learn, the reproof left him crestfallen.

“Children need to enjoy themselves and be creative,” Lee says. “They can learn the technicalities later.”

The Strobels also bought Alison numerous books to read at home. She’d have three or four on her nightstand at any one time.

“Many times Mom would come into my room and say, ‘You really need to go to sleep now,’” Alison recalls. “But she never said, ‘That’s it! I’m turning out the lights and taking these books away!’”

Lee gave his daughter a portable typewriter that he had used during his 14-year newspaper career. Alison

lugged it around wherever she wrote: on the porch, in the garage, even up a tree in the front yard. Her dad also supplied her with all the notebook paper, pencils, typewriter ribbons and correcting fluid she needed.

The fictional *Worlds Collide* has several autobiographical elements. Grace, the main character, moves to Southern California from Chicago and wants to be a fifth-grade teacher, just like Alison. But Alison didn’t have an abusive boyfriend as Grace does.

Both Lee, 53, and Alison, 29, took a circuitous route to becoming full-time authors. After converting to Christianity, Lee left newspapers and joined the pastoral staffs at two of the nation’s most influential megachurches — Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Ill.; and Saddleback Valley Community Church in Lake Forest, Calif.

As an 11-year-old boy, Lee remembers being discouraged when he interviewed an author down the block for that neighborhood newspaper. “I told him I wanted to be a writer and he said it was almost impossible to make a living as a writer,” Lee recalls. “I carried that thought with me for much of my life.”

In addition to *The Case for Christ*, he has written seven other best sellers, including *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary* as well as *Surviving a Spiritual Mismatch in Marriage*.

Alison didn’t have anyone telling her she couldn’t make it. But initially she chose the steady paycheck of the teaching profession. When WaterBrook

Press came calling with a contract after reading her 144,000-word manuscript, Alison realized she, too, could make a living as a writer.

“Many people try to be too practical and don’t ever pursue their passion,” Alison says. “I’m grateful that God



Successful author Lee Strobel (left) has seen daughter Alison follow in his writing footsteps.



has allowed me to do the things I love and that my parents were willing to let me try.”

Both daughter and father keep busy with other projects. Lee just wrapped up the second season of PAX TV’s weekly talk show *Faith Under Fire*. Alison continues to tutor students part time because she enjoys seeing students learn. But it appears as though writing is in the Strobel genes for the long run.

“I’m so proud of Alison,” Lee says. “She’s an excellent writer — much better than I was at that age.” ■

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