

# Father Knows Best

Duluth Author Gregory E. Lang Puts Love into Words

By Amy Meadows

One afternoon in November 1998, Gregory E. Lang drove to the nearby post office with his daughter Meagan. When they arrived and walked up to the mailbox, he handed her an envelope. It was the first query Lang had ever sent out to a publisher about his manuscript “Why a Daughter Needs a Dad: 100 Reasons,” and he wanted Meagan to be part of the momentous occasion.

“Remember this,” he said to her as she dropped the letter into the slot, “because I’m starting something here that is important.”

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## Gregory E. Lang

These profound words rang true. Not only did Lang's book become a runaway success in the gift book genre and sell more than 600,000 copies, but it also spawned nine additional books that have fluently captured the delicate nature of family relationships and have touched the hearts of readers worldwide. In addition, "Why a Daughter Needs a Dad" launched the prolific writing career that Lang never expected, but always wanted.

Yet, Lang is the first person to admit that becoming a best-selling scribe isn't easy. Actually, publishing his first book was an extremely challenging undertaking. But perseverance paved the way for this sentimental author.

### THE BIRTH OF AN IDEA

Every great writer has a muse. When Lang started writing, that source of inspiration was his beloved Meagan. "I have a cardboard box loaded with things that I've saved that my daughter has given me over the years. We've always called it the 'Meagan Box,' " he explained. "For a long time, I've wanted to take the best pieces out of the Meagan Box and mount them in a shadowbox to keep on display at home to try to show my daughter what she means to me. But I could never choose which pieces I wanted to use."

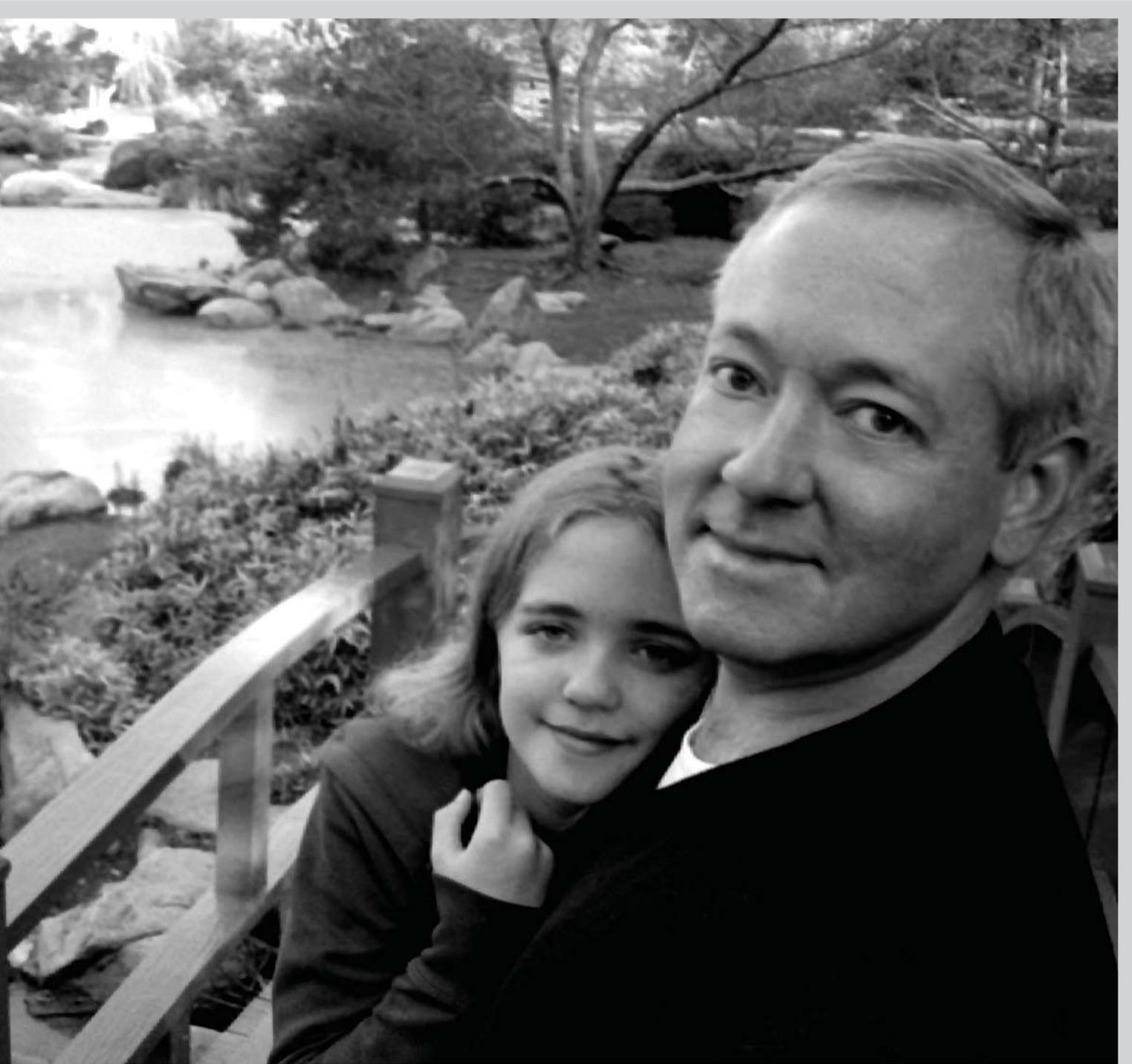
Instead, he sat down one day and started to make a list of all the things he's reminded of when he goes through the box. The list grew quickly and suddenly took on new meaning for Lang. "The more I wrote, the more I felt like I wanted to give it a purpose," he revealed. So he began turning the entries on his list into brief epigrams. With adages like "A daughter needs a dad so that she will have at least one hero who will not let her down" and "A daughter needs a dad who teaches her she is important by stopping what he is doing to watch her," Lang realized that what he had created could actually be a book. So he put 100 reasons into manuscript form and shared it with Meagan.

"After first reading the book, I was in complete awe of my father," said Meagan, now



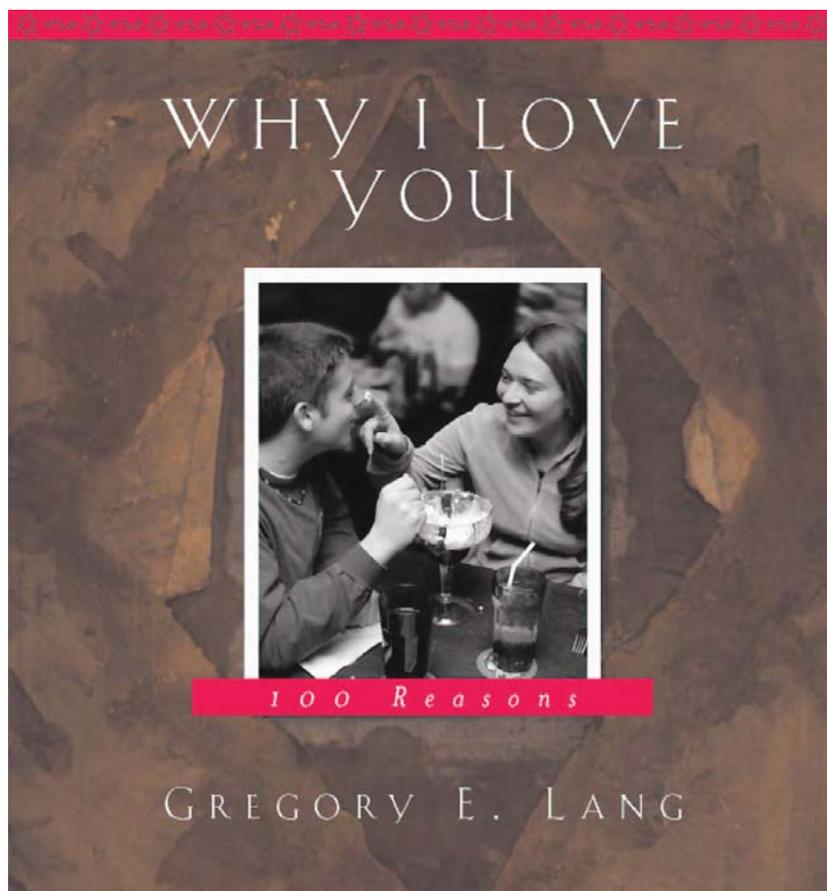
15. "I cried and gave him a hug, and the only thing I could think to say was, 'I love you too, Daddy.' The flow of his words amazes me, as well as the way he so simplistically expresses a feeling that runs very deep."

Her reaction was the impetus Lang needed to prepare his book for the publishing world and the public.



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MEAGAN LANG



while Greg could look at it from a father's perspective. Then we met in the middle."

Moran enlisted the help of friends and acquaintances to pose for a series of photo shoots, and the result was a collection of elegant black-and-white pictures that depict fathers and daughters of all ages and circumstances. Lang and Moran then created a mock-up and, soon enough, they were ready to send out their labor of love.

#### SIXTY-THIRD TIME'S A CHARM

"For four years, I shopped this proposal and mock-up book all over the country. I got rejected 62 times; I saved all my rejection letters," Lang mused. "But I believed in the book and, because it was for my child, it became almost imperative not to give up. So I forged ahead."

Fortunately, the 63rd proposal ended up on Ron Pitkin's desk. As the publisher of Cumberland House Publishing in Nashville, Tenn., Pitkin saw something in the manuscript. "A book on relationships has to ring of truth so people will relate to it," he said. "In the book, the sentiments and emotions of the father-daughter relationship rang true. Greg is able to clearly verbalize what most fathers feel."

Pitkin informed Lang that he was interested in the book, but then sat on the manuscript for nearly a year. Presuming the opportunity had passed, Lang finally wrote a letter asking for his proposal and photos back. Pitkin promptly revisited the manuscript and decided to publish it without delay.

Meagan was the first person to receive the good news via fax. "I read the header and literally just screamed. I knew that this would be the beginning of something completely wonderful for us," she said.

She was right. The initial printing of 10,000 copies sold out immediately, and reorders flooded in from retailers like Barnes & Noble, Target, Babies "R" Us and Family Christian Stores. "Why a Daughter Needs a Dad" shot to No. 505 on *Amazon.com* and climbed to the No. 6 spot on the *New York Times* bestseller list. Lang even received a

#### A PICTURE'S WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

When Lang decided that his words needed a pictographic complement, he set out to find a photographer who could bring his vision to life. He noticed an *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* article about the Atlanta College of Art that spotlighted Janet Lankford-Moran, a photography student who specialized in portraiture. Lang wrote a letter to the school and got in touch with Moran, who jumped at the chance to collaborate with the budding writer.

Ultimately, Moran was the perfect choice for the project. She keenly understood the heartfelt message in Lang's manuscript, particularly because she shares such a special relationship with her own father, who raised her after her mother passed away. "It was really a nice fit," Moran noted. "I could look at the project from a daughter's perspective,

#### WHY A DAUGHTER NEEDS A DAD

*A daughter needs a dad who will never think she is too old to need him.*

*A daughter needs a dad to teach her that family is more important than work.*

*A daughter needs a dad to show her that true love is unconditional.*

*A daughter needs a dad to prepare her to persevere through hardship.*

*A daughter needs a dad so she learns that men can be trustworthy.*



# Gregory E. Lang

## WHY A SON NEEDS A MOM

*A son needs a mom to make sure his socks match.*

*A son needs a mom to make sure he has good memories to hold on to.*

*A son needs a mom to advise him when he falls in love.*

*A son needs a mom who is always excited to hear his news.*

*A son needs a mom who will always make sure he has a home to come back to.*



letter from Vice President Dick Cheney, who received one of the White House's promotional copies and wanted to tell the author how much he enjoyed the book.

According to Pitkin, "I see a lot of manuscripts, and once in a while you get one that you know will do well. Of course, it's hard to anticipate, but this all came together well."

So well, in fact, that Cumberland House asked Lang to write more books for the "100 Reasons" series. In addition to "Why a Daughter Needs a Dad," his titles now include: "Why a Son Needs a Dad," "Why a Daughter Needs a Mom," "Why a Son Needs a Mom," "Why I Love Grandma," "Why I Love Grandpa," "Why I Love You," "Why I Chose You" (about adoption) and "Why I Need You" (from a child's perspective). He currently is working on his 10th book called "Why We are a Family."

All of the books follow the original format of axioms set off by black-and-white images, and Lang has followed the same process to develop each one. "I drive around with a notebook in my car, and everything that comes to mind I just constantly write down," he said. "I listen to lyrics very carefully when I'm listening to music. I listen to conversation very carefully and hammer out as many different little epigrams as I can think of. When I'm ready to pull them together into a book, I literally just go back and reread everything I've written so far."

As he has sold more than 1.2 million copies, Lang is recognized as Barnes & Nobles' top-selling gift book author. His books have been translated into Spanish, Korean and Chinese, and Blue Mountain Arts acquired the rights to make Father's Day and Mother's Day greeting cards, providing a whole new outlet for his poignant work.

#### EMOTIONAL EXPLORATION

“People see themselves in these books,” said Lisa Taylor, Lang’s editor at Cumberland House. “And you can see that Greg’s reaching inside of himself, using his memories and his experiences to relate to his audience.”

“I try to deal with love, forgiveness, duty and faith in each of the books,” asserted Lang, who includes a personal introduction that illustrates the theme of each book. The introductions, as well as the books themselves, allow him to explore the emotions, successes and even the mistakes that are tied to his own relationships and experiences as a divorced parent, a son, a grandson, a sibling and, most recently, a new husband to his wife Jill and a stepfather to her 11-year-old daughter Linley.

Lang actually met Jill when he was developing the concept for “Why I Love You.” They married in 2004, and Lang

acknowledges that their courtship changed how he viewed his writing. “I met Jill, and I couldn’t stop writing,” he declared. “I’m more inspired because, in the past, I was writing from my emotions for my child, my love of my parents and then remembrances. But nothing was contemporary because I was single and not seriously involved. Well, now I’m madly in love, and I have a constant companion. So the things I was writing about from memory are today very much alive.”

Jill, however, believes that her husband’s articulate writing is an innate quality. “He is so in tune with his emotions, and he’s able to put down into words what a lot of men feel but would feel awkward saying,” she contended.

Lang attributes this unique ability to the love he received from his family while growing up in Macon. “In my family, it was just understood that you’re always going to

get loved and hugged and kissed and squeezed,” he said. “And people were going to talk about their feelings. That’s just the environment that I grew up in. It was understood that you have to confess to what’s in your heart.”

#### REACHING READERS’ HEARTS

Lang’s readers are grateful for his gift of expression. He knows this because he receives e-mail messages daily from people who have embraced his books not only as gifts, but also as tools to open lines of communication within their relationships. Some people have given the books as stocking stuffers, while others have used them during a proposal. Others have presented one of his books as a means of repairing a damaged relationship. Several people have even buried loved ones with Lang’s books. Oftentimes, the readers will

WHY I LOVE YOU

*I love you because you always smile when our eyes meet.*

*I love you because time has shown me that I can trust you.*

*I love you because you know how to turn around a bad day.*

*I love you because you still write me love letters.*

*I love you because you are my best friend.*



explain how they personalized his books, adding their own epigrams and placing their own photographs among the pages.

“Most of the time, I cry when I read these e-mails. They just touch me so profoundly,” Lang admitted. “I feel rewarded. I feel very blessed. I do say thanks for the way these books have worked out. And it’s not boastful pride of authorship; it’s a real joy of seeing people respond so personally to what are my personal stories.”

One reader wrote, “I just wanted you to know how much I enjoyed your book. I’m stationed overseas and my tent-mate shared his copy with me.” “The introduction alone was enough to make me weep,” Lang said. “As I continued on, it only touched me more.” The soldier went on, “I just thought you might like some feedback from a serviceman far away from his wife and most precious daughter. I will ask my wife to find me my own copy so that I may share it with my fellow troops.”

Another father wrote, “This Christmas, I was given a gift that I will always treasure. My daughter Ashley gave to me ‘Why a Daughter Needs a Dad,’ and she had written her own thoughts throughout the book. Well, I must tell you that it took quite a while to read through because of the tears in my eyes. I have never been given such a meaningful gift before; to me, this book from Ashley is priceless. I will have it always.”

Of course, mothers (and many others) find the same delight in the books. “I just became a first-time mother of a son in May, and I must say that I absolutely loved your book,” read another message. “I have tears streaming down my cheeks as I read and reread each page. The book is a beautiful portrayal of everything I hope to be to my son.”

When considering these messages, Lang replied, “For someone else to identify with my stories — that’s very uplifting. It makes me want to write more.”

**A NEW JOURNEY**

While “Why We are a Family” will be the last book in the “100 Reasons” series, Lang plans to continue with his newfound career. A graduate of Mercer University who holds a Ph.D. in Human Development from UGA, he main-

tained a full-time job in the healthcare industry while writing his book series. But he recently made the leap to full-time author and has several new projects pending, including two more books with Cumberland House and a novel he’s currently shopping around. He’s also become quite the photographer since he began sharing photo responsibilities with Moran after she moved to Chicago.

“I have a huge list of ideas that I want to work on now that I’m going to invest in this full-time,” said Lang, who takes inspiration from classic and contemporary Southern writers like Flannery O’Connor and Nicholas Sparks. But while he is opening new doors in the publishing world, he doesn’t plan to walk away from the tried-and-true. He is a proven entity in the gift book genre, and he simply plans to use his experience to create new opportunities.

According to Jill, “The sky’s the limit now that he is not doing this in his spare time. And we’re both excited about building a future on his creativity, his writing ability and his eloquence.”

Of course, the “100 Reasons” series will continue to move readers in perpetuity. It’s something that Lang never predicted, especially after 62 rejections. “For anyone who thinks that they have a calling and they haven’t succeeded in it yet, don’t quit,” he advised.

Meagan is particularly inspired by her father’s accomplishments. “The determination and faith in his books is what gives me inspiration. He worked so hard and for so long to get his books published and not once did he ever show doubt. I admire him for going after what he so desperately wanted,” Meagan asserted. “He is a great man who is trying to make his mark in the world, and he wants others to feel the feelings of love that God has given him in his life.”

What started out as a tribute from a father to a daughter has become so much more. For Gregory Lang, it’s the realization of a once grand aspiration. “I never dreamed that it would be like this,” he said. “I feel like we have a mission to make sure that more people know about [these books], so they might be able to use the books as that medium to communicate something that they can’t say by themselves.” ■

*Photos courtesy of Gregory Lang.*