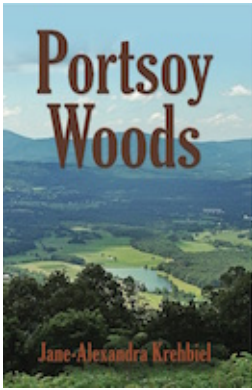


# Portsoy Woods

Jane-Alexandra Krehbiel



United States...

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*With one foot in employment in modern day intelligence analysis and the other firmly footed in a rural community led by farmers, homeschooling families, survivalists, mavericks and Mennonites, they learn many new skills as they carve a satisfying life, while watching a serious economic and cultural decline within the*

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# **Portsoy Woods**

**Jane-Alexandra Krehbiel**

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## Chapter One: Happenstance

Sometimes I consider how the small decisions in our lives can open an entirely new path, and then, paths beyond that. Life is a lot like crocheting a blanket. Sometimes, we begin and we find ourselves, almost mindlessly, particularly at the beginning of a project, crocheting a slightly different stitch and therefore, a new pattern. Rather than realizing this was not our intention, and then pulling the yarn, removing the unusual stitch and starting again, we continue. The result is that we shape that blanket in what started in an unconscious fashion, in a manner we had not anticipated. Sometimes, some of our best choices and best decisions come from a decision made in one day, perhaps lightly, which shaped the rest of our lives. Sometimes I think that most of the best decisions in my life occurred as a result of happenstance.

I met my husband at the Christmas party of a friend. In my twenties, I was working in major medical center as a registered nurse, and I wasn't really meeting anyone. I wasn't sure I wanted to be married to a physician, as I certainly didn't want to talk about medical issues and opinions, in my off time. I wanted to be an equal partner in marriage. I didn't like the sound of being dominated, and I wasn't sure that I could be. My friend, Paula, was a medical social worker at the university hospital in which we worked, and she invited me to her home to a party she was having for people she knew from work, and for people who worked with her husband. I almost didn't go that evening. Paula was a shameless, but rather effective, matchmaker. I suppose she wanted everyone she knew to be as happy as she and her husband so clearly were.

I will probably never know why she chose to introduce me to Michael. Michael worked as an intelligence analyst for an independent company that was contracted to a government agency. He knew Paula's husband Steve. At first glance, we don't seem very much alike. Michael at least at first, tends to be quiet and a bit of a wallflower, whereas I am more comfortable talking with people. He is perfectly comfortable with awkward silence, and I work hard to try to put people at ease, while filling in such silences. However,



very quickly, from our meeting and beyond, we found that we agreed on the essential elements of life. We felt similarly with regard to work ethic, faith, family, money, and how children should be raised. I met Michael that evening, and neither of us ever dated anyone else again. It was almost as if we had located one another again following a long cosmic separation that neither of us had chosen. We simply seemed to pick up where we had left off in some long forgotten past. Two weeks after our meeting, Michael helped me move, and somehow I knew, even then, that he would likely be a part of every move I would make, for the rest of our lives.

We were married in a low key but lovely church ceremony with our close friends, our parents, and a few of our co-workers in attendance. We didn't have unreasonable or extravagant expectations for the wedding, and so everything went well. We rented the meeting room in a church for a reception, and had it catered as a buffet, and it is still one of the loveliest weddings I can remember.

After we were married, I took a job at a different Northern Virginia hospital, because I had the option of changing jobs, and at that time, Michael did not enjoy the same level of flexibility. We both worked hard to save for a first home, as futile as that, at first, seemed. Northern Virginia is an expensive area, but we were rather fortunate. Michael is quite good at networking. Someone Michael knew at work had inherited his mother's home, and was anxious to sell it with as little work as possible on his part, and without paying a real estate commission. We bought the brick three bedroom ranch home, and worked hard to remove the items his mother had left, to paint the interior, update its kitchen and bathrooms, and to finish its large basement. I remember really loving our first home, and feeling very fortunate that we were able to buy such a home in our twenties. Michael was less enamored by it, mostly because he wanted more land, and additional land in the area was quite expensive. At the time, more land most certainly seemed out of reach for us. The days went quickly. We both worked and entertained friends when we had time off. Within a year of buying our home, we were expecting our first child.

## Chapter Two: Firstborn

Kristin Emily was born following a relatively normal pregnancy and a lengthy labor and delivery. Kristin was an unusual baby who rapidly fell into a routine, and was happily trouble free. Our adjustment occurred fairly quickly. This left us with, perhaps, the false perception that others who may have had a more difficult transition to parenthood, just didn't work hard enough to establish a routine. Fairly quickly, I returned to work part time using an in-home childcare provider named Claire. Our adjustment and my return to work was enviably easy.

Nursing is a difficult occupation, but not for the reasons you might think. Most registered nurses now have a Bachelor's degree, and there is great pressure to continue one's education in nursing regardless of the level in which you began. Nurses in hospitals usually work twelve hours in one day. Nurses often work three shifts or more each week responsible to their specific unit or division, and are still required, often by contract, to be continuing additional certifications or work toward the next degree. I always enjoyed the academics of nursing, and I did well in school. However, as anyone with an imagination or a good memory will tell you, being a witness to human suffering is not easy. A physician is often able to see a patient in pain or with discomfort for only five or ten minutes a day while hospitalized. However, a nurse is often there for the painful or poignant moments while one fights for life, or slowly loses grip of it. Additionally, moving a patient with intravenous bags "A" through "J" with two intravenous pumps and a cardiac monitor to a CT scanner on another floor and back again can be difficult and backbreaking work. Nursing units are no longer staffed as well as they once were and there are still some things that must be done by licensed nurses. Also, most find that once you have children you find that calling in sick for either yourself or your child, even rarely, is an option that never does sit well in the workplace, as it leaves those who actually did show up with an often untenable workload. Lastly, once you have children, one often begins to understand our place in the universe. We are not immortal. We have children, we age, eventually we become ill and we die. Eventually, every patient truly becomes someone's father, mother, sister,

brother or child. I also found that working in a hospital when the children started coming left me quite concerned regarding the probabilities of bringing viruses and bacteria home to my children. Many illnesses, including Type I diabetes can be unmasked by repeated viral exposures to varietal viruses, like *Coxsackie B* virus, for example. A surprising number of physicians and nurses have children with Type I, autoimmune diabetes which is theorized to be, at least in some patients, the result of a succession of such viral exposures which eventually triggers the autoimmune destruction of the beta cells of the pancreas which make insulin.

When Kristin was almost a year old, we began to think of having another child. After all, the first one had been relatively easy and was so well behaved. It would be nice to have a little brother for her. We had friends who were dealing with secondary infertility following the birth of their first child now a preschooler, and so we thought that we should best try again soon, since it could take some time. Surprisingly, I believe that the first time we had unprotected sex again that our second child was conceived. This time, I had much more trouble juggling work, an early pregnancy, a toddler, a husband, a household, grocery shopping and the exhaustion that accompanied all of it.

## Chapter Five: At Thanksgiving

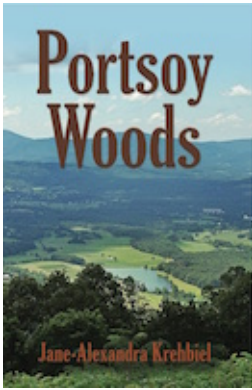
I remember that Michael and I did not take a vacation that year. He wished to clean up the last of the medical bills for the kids, and some things were going on at work, and he didn't want to be away. He said we might take some time off later in the year.

My in-laws live in Maryland. My father-in-law was a defense contractor and a professional engineer. His wife, Vera, is a rather talented stay-at-home wife and mother. Vera can make homemade bread while simultaneously reupholstering an ottoman, and preparing the necessary items for the income tax return of her husband's business. She can do all of these things well and complete them just in time to make a great dinner that evening from scratch, including dessert. She was multi-tasking before it ever had a name. You may think that I am exaggerating here, but I assure you, that I am not. Vera is simply amazing. Michael is their only child. They are gracious people, although I will admit that early in our marriage, I never really felt included when all of them were together. Perhaps some small families share an intimacy that is never really shared with others when their son marries. I try not to worry about this much. Compared to my mother-in-law I am sure I am wholly inadequate as a housewife. On the other hand, I don't think she could place an intravenous line in someone in the hospital quite as speedily as I. If I were globally inept, I don't think Michael would have married me. Vera fits well in the era in which she married and raised her family, and I think I fit well in my own.

In the year in which the twins were born, my in-laws began to visit a bit more often. I thought this was natural as they no doubt wished to see their grandchildren. However, they seemed to spend a lot of time quietly talking to Michael, and then everyone would stop talking when I entered the room to offer something else to drink, or to tell them dinner was ready.

Michael's parents came to have Thanksgiving dinner with us which couldn't have been much fun for them. Kristin and Chloe had colds and Michael and Hunter got immunizations a few days before and were both cranky. That year I prepared a large roast turkey with gravy, sweet potatoes,

mashed potatoes, cauliflower with cheese, broccoli with cheese, string beans, corn, and a savory dressing which I make that remains separate from the turkey. They brought several bottles of sparkling cider for us to drink with dinner. Although I warmed the rolls to make them rise, I forgot them and never did bake them in time to serve with the meal. For dessert we had chocolate silk pie, pumpkin pie or mince pie. There was a lot of food left over after everyone had finished. While I put everything in the refrigerator and loaded the dishwasher, Michael and his parents took their sparkling cider to the family room and talked for a long time. I imagined that there was something serious going on, but that Michael would tell me later. They left pretty quickly the following day, and though I waited for Michael to tell me what the conversation was about, he never did. I asked about it later, and he said something about finances as it related to his father's retirement.



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