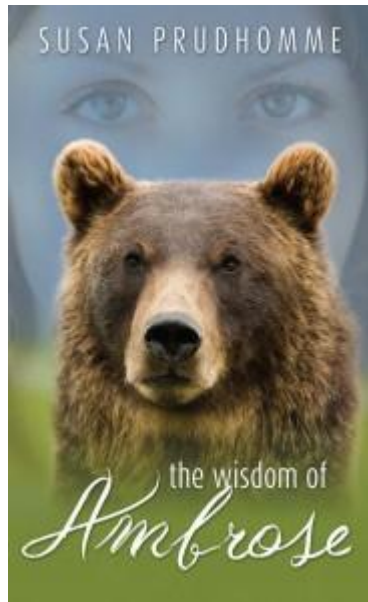


The Wisdom of Ambrose by Susan Prudhomme (OakTara, February 2011) 167 pages.
Reviewed by Christine Sunderland



In this delightful fantasy by Susan Prudhomme, empty-nester Susan Anderson seeks to find her true identity among the lofty and silent redwoods of Northern California. She crosses into another world, a parallel time, and meets Ambrose, a large brown bear.

As baby-boomer mothers watch their children grow up and leave home, they are left with painful gaps in their lives. Some have professions that fill their hearts, minds, and hours, and perhaps for these busier moms the question of identity may be put off until retirement, perhaps not. Those who dedicated those eighteen (plus) years to their children (and spouse) as stay-at-home moms may find the gap immense. Those who controlled every hour of every day, scheduling events, being "Super Moms", may ask themselves desperate questions.

And so Susan Anderson, her husband challenged by his teaching job, her children grown and gone, is filled with unease. She has learned over the years the habit of love, of caring for, of guiding. She has controlled and organized, to create a happy home life. In a sense she has lived through others in this caretaking – her husband, her children. Being a homemaker is, I believe, a naturally satisfying role for women, and in our culture vitally necessary to the raising of the next generation, the stability of marriage and family, and the health of American culture. It is a hugely important job and tragically underappreciated. But what happens when suddenly (or so it seems) they no longer have children to fill their days, when controlling others is no longer possible?

Susan Anderson's loss and search for herself is a universal experience, shared by men and women in all walks of life, in all times and places. We move through our weeks in varying ways, thinking our work and our relationships identify us. When the job is lost, the family member gone (mother, father, spouse, child), the best friend relocated, or the marriage threatened, a void is left and we are forced to face ourselves, our true identity. Like Susan, each of us asks, "Who am I?", "Why am I here?", "How do I fill the void?" In *The Wisdom of Ambrose*, the other Susan, author Susan Prudhomme, offers profound answers.

This short novel is a well-written, elegant, and captivating tale, fine for any age but particularly appropriate for empty-nesters. As I turned the pages, becoming more and more enchanted, I often thought of Milne's *Winnie the Pooh*, Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. Ambrose, who calls himself "just a bear," comes to life, as do the other creatures we meet in these majestic woods.

Theologically, we can trust in this tale that the answer to Susan Anderson's quest is not in the natural world, for the animals too are "bent," working their own way through their own time.

This is not a pantheistic, nature worshiping, animistic tale, and tree-huggers be warned. The answer to Susan's quest lies in a Christian cosmology, where a Great King reigns and a Lady of the Forest guides her people to be good. The natural world is, to paraphrase Hopkins, charged with the grandeur of God, and lingering there can be inspiring.

It was a great pleasure to spend time among the majestic redwoods and the burbling streams, the birds and the small creatures. I entered a world that adults are prone to forget, with notes of earlier innocent days, and it was good to be back. I loved Ambrose, and am most grateful for Susan Prudhomme's lovely book.

I'm now looking forward to her next novel, *The Forest*, not a sequel, but the first of a trilogy, and more pages of Christian enchantment.