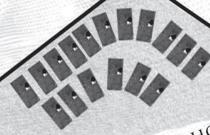


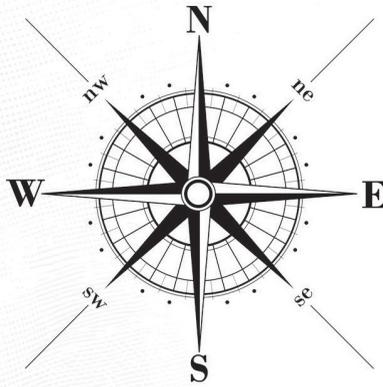
THE  
SINNERS'  
GARDEN

WILLIAM SIRLS

BROWNSTOWN



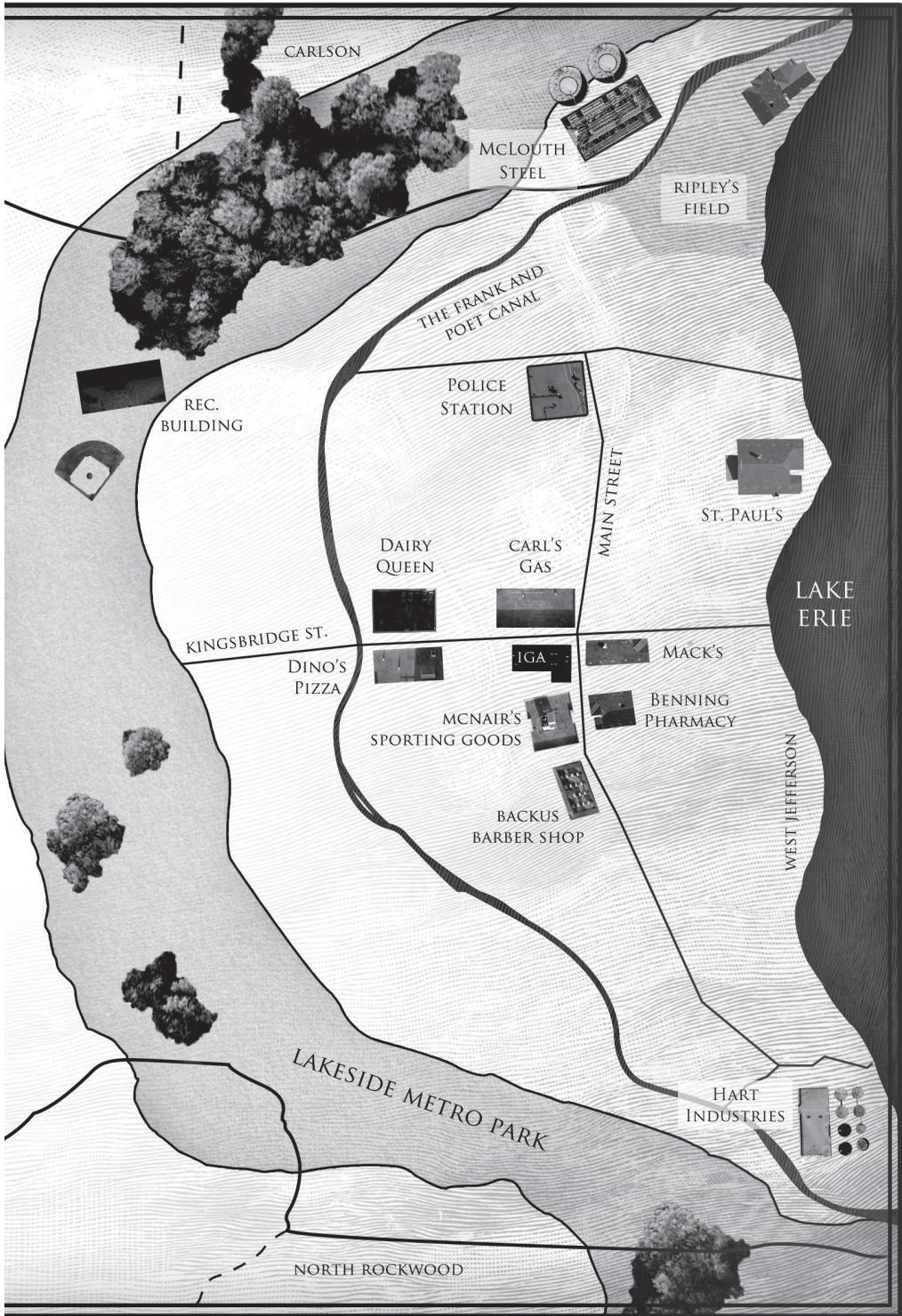
MOBILE HOME PARK



FLAT  
ROCK

# BENNING TOWNSHIP

HUCKABONE



CARLSON

MCLOUTH STEEL

RIPLEY'S FIELD

THE FRANK AND POET CANAL

REC. BUILDING

POLICE STATION

DAIRY QUEEN

CARL'S GAS

MAIN STREET

ST. PAUL'S

LAKE ERIE

KINGSBRIDGE ST.

DINO'S PIZZA

IGA

MACK'S

MCNAIR'S SPORTING GOODS

BENNING PHARMACY

BACKUS BARBER SHOP

WEST JEFFERSON

LAKESIDE METRO PARK

HART INDUSTRIES

NORTH ROCKWOOD

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

*God must be in prison, because that's where so many people seem to meet Him . . .*

I heard that line well over ten years ago, and as funny as it seemed at the time, it's interesting how its meaning has changed for me since then. With that said, I wouldn't have forgiven myself had Gerald Ripley not encountered that phrase—or some variation of it—in the story. I owed it to him, because truth be told, he reminds me quite a bit of someone I know very well.

I love being an author, and writing *The Sinners' Garden* was a lot of fun. It also presented quite a few challenges for me from the first couple of drafts to what ultimately became the book you are holding now. Andy's character has undergone significant changes, including going from a twenty-four-year-old who rode a moped to a fourteen-year-old who rode a motorcycle. Kevin Hart's fate changed dramatically, not by the stroke of a pen, but by my accidental deletion of the original ending along with around nineteen thousand other words, which was roughly the last twenty percent

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of the book. As miffed as I was when it happened, I'm now looking back and am kind of glad it happened, because everything really does happen for a *reason* and rewriting it gave me an opportunity to take the story in a much different direction, including having Kevin Hart in the Cochran house at the end. Sorry about that, Kev-O.

I think most authors want to entertain readers, but as a Christian author with a checkered past, I thought it was extremely important to try to share some of the lessons I've learned, and I hope that readers walk away from *The Sinners' Garden* feeling closer to God from the experience.

Lots of people helped me hone and craft my story, so please bear with me . . .

First of all, I would like to thank the readers. I hope you enjoyed the story as much as I did writing it and that it somehow makes a difference in your life.

Thanks to my good friend with the English accent, Alan Bower from Author Solutions. Alan has been a proverbial godsend to my writing career. He has an amazing passion for publishing, and the interest he takes in the authors he works with is second to none. Thanks also to his better half, Erica Dooley-Dorocke. Together, you have gone out of your way to help me and I recognize the difference you made.

Chris Cancilliari is the first one to see anything I write and has been the recipient of countless last-second phone calls and e-mails, where I'm usually asking her to proofread something I'm about to send off to the wonderful editors I work with. Thanks, Chris. I usually ended our calls by calling you my hero or the greatest of all time. I meant it.

Natalie Hanemann and Lisa Bergren are my wonderful editors. Both of these ladies epitomize what many refer to as "the patience

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

of Job.” I am truly blessed to be able to work with them, and I know I’ve said it before, but there is no one in the world I’d rather have help me tell my stories. Thanks for putting up with me and for guiding me through the rough spots in the book. You have taught me so much, and I’m truly appreciative. Thank you.

I’d like to thank everyone who either offered advice or read an earlier version of the book, particularly: Brett Kays, Hyacinth Palmer, Cousin Sharon Coventry, Bob Deragisch, Angel Mason, Kim Falkowski-Lewis, Cherilyn Barber, Melissa West Morris, Donna O’Brien, Susan Tant, JoEllen Hurst, Belinda Cornett, Rhonda Raft, Elizabeth Sloan, Duke Malnyok, Tommy Arsenaault, Fred Bisaro, Lynn “LJ” Bisaro, Carol Bodenhorn, Jil Burks Cooper, Cindy Benedict Barclay, Pat Pittsnogle, Joe Milosic, Kay Campbell, Gail Welborn, Karla Dorman, Liz Zeller, Judi McNair, Tom Ayers, Aunt Paulette Pedigo, Cousin Susan Shelton, and my sister, Karen. Sometimes an author can get so close to a story that he can’t see it and all of your input and suggestions made my life a lot easier. Thank you so much.

Thanks to Daisy Hutton and her team at Thomas Nelson, including Ruthie Dean, Katie Bond, Ami McConnell, Amanda Bostic, Becky Monds, Jodi Hughes, and Kristen Vasgaard. What a year of changes we’ve all had. I appreciate everything you do.

Marjo Myers. Thanks again for your friendship and for getting the ball rolling by reading the original galley of *The Reason*. I’m guessing that you may have recognized a special little girl’s name in *The Sinners’ Garden* . . .

Thanks to all of you who have read *The Reason* and helped make it a bestseller. I’ve enjoyed meeting many of you, and your phone calls, e-mails, and letters have meant so much to me and have changed the reason why I will continue to write.

Speaking of *The Reason*, this may sound like a bit of a roll call of the book’s characters, but I want to thank my family. Thanks

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to Jim, Shirley, Kim, Karen, Kathy, Kaitlyn, and Macey. A special thanks to Ken and Alison for their support and belief in my writing. I love you all and thank you again for being you.

Finally, I want to thank God. You have been way too good to me. I'm so glad that You never step aside or quit doing Your thing. I am living proof of Your miracles and grace and will do my best to do the only thing You ask of me.

And that is to *only believe*.

William Sirls  
Gibraltar, Michigan  
June 5, 2013

# READING GROUP GUIDE

1. What did the garden symbolize for you?
2. Do you think Rip actually made the jump over The Frank and Poet? Why or why not?
3. Why do you think we don't see as many miracles today as they did in Bible times?
4. Rip had a sign above his front door that said "SERVANTS' ENTRANCE." How do you apply this in your life?
5. Is there a voice inside of you that tells you what to do? What are some examples?
6. At Bible study, Rip talks about how people get into daily routines that don't include time for God. Is this a challenge for you? If not, what are some strategies you use to make sure you have time?
7. Judi spent a great deal of time living in the past. What did she need to do to move forward with her life? Have you or someone you loved ever struggled with the same thing? How did they/you get past it?

## READING GROUP GUIDE

8. Have you ever pondered the spiritual whereabouts of a deceased loved one? How did you deal with that?
9. Rip believed that the Bible tells us to confront someone when we see them going astray. Do you agree or disagree?
10. What did Andy learn from little Marjo? Have you ever needed to hear something similar? Discuss.
11. Rip mentioned that being one person on Sunday and somebody else the rest of the week wasn't uncommon in the world. What did he mean by that? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
12. Andy wanted to celebrate at the end. Why don't Christians celebrate more at funerals?
13. Andy told Judi, "It's your time to show others God's strength in you . . . His ability to heal." Have you experienced an opportunity to do this? Describe.
14. Pastor Welsh told Rip that being a Christian comes with a great deal of responsibility. What do you think he meant by that?