

*Rhonda Ortiz*  
HISTORICAL FICTION AUTHOR

**MEDIA KIT**



## ABOUT RHONDA ORTIZ

Rhonda Franklin Ortiz is an award-winning novelist, nonfiction writer, and founding editor of Chrism Press. *In Pieces*, the first novel of her *Molly Chase* series, was the recipient of two awards, including the competitive ACFW Genesis Contest.

Rhonda's articles on spirituality, family life, and arts and culture have been published by a variety of popular media outlets, including Integrated Catholic Life, CatholicMom.com, Aleteia, and Catholic World Report. She was a contributor to *The Catholic Mom's Prayer Companion: A Book of Daily Reflections* and is the creator of Scripture for the Scrupulous, an email service providing guided meditations that address anxiety and religious scrupulosity.

Rhonda is a member of the Catholic Writers Guild, American Christian Fiction Writers, Oregon Christian Writers, and the Historical Novel Society. She is also a fully professed lay member of the Order of Preachers (the Dominicans).

A native Oregonian, Rhonda attended St. John's College in historic Annapolis, Maryland and now lives in Michigan with her husband and children. Find her online at [rhondaortiz.com](http://rhondaortiz.com).

### ABBREVIATED BIO

Rhonda Ortiz is a Genesis award-winning novelist, nonfiction writer, and founding editor of Chrism Press. A native Oregonian, she attended St. John's College in historic Annapolis, Maryland and now lives in Michigan with her husband and children. Find her online at [rhondaortiz.com](http://rhondaortiz.com).

### ABBREVIATED BIO FOR CATHOLIC PUBLICATIONS

Rhonda Ortiz is a Lay Dominican, award-winning novelist, nonfiction writer, founding editor of Chrism Press, and creator of Scripture for the Scrupulous. A native Oregonian, she attended St. John's College in historic Annapolis, Maryland and now lives in Michigan with her husband and children. Find her online at [rhondaortiz.com](http://rhondaortiz.com).

### SAMPLE OF PAST MEDIA APPEARANCES

*Morning Air with John Harper*, Relevant Radio  
*LA Catholic Morning* with Todd Sylvester and Ellen Taylor, Archangel Radio  
*A Seeking Heart* with Allison Gingras

### CONTACT INFORMATION

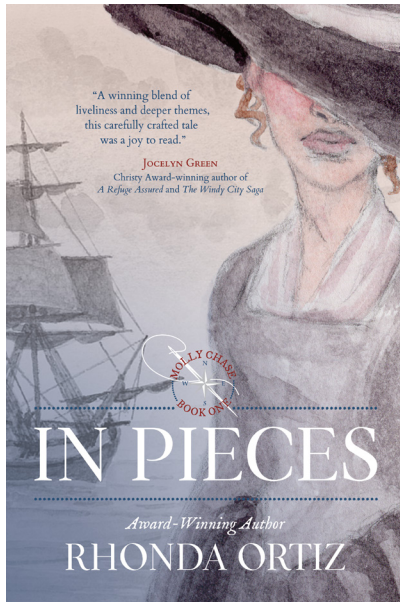
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### SOCIAL MEDIA

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## BOOKS



### GENRE

Historical romance with elements of family drama, society drama, and political suspense

### AUDIENCE

Adult

### PUBLISHER

Chrism Press, a division of  
WhiteFire Publishing  
[www.chrismpress.com](http://www.chrismpress.com)

### PUBLICATION DATE

October 1, 2021

### ISBN

978-1-941720-43-1 (paperback)  
978-1-941720-44-8 (digital)

## *In Pieces*

MOLLY CHASE, BOOK ONE

by Rhonda Ortiz



*Certain things ruin a girl's reputation, and madness is one.*

BOSTON, 1793—Beautiful and artistic, the only daughter of a prominent merchant, Molly Chase cannot help but attract the notice of Federalist Boston—especially its men. But she carries a painful secret: her father committed suicide and she found his body. Now nightmares plague her day and night, addling her mind and rendering her senseless. Molly needs a home, a nurse, and time to grieve and to find new purpose in life. But when she moves in with her friends, the Robbs, spiteful society gossips assume the worst. And when an imprudent decision leads to public scandal, Molly is tempted to take the easy way out: a marriage of convenience.

Merchant sailor Josiah Robb is as familiar to Molly as a brother—as dear and as exasperating. Yet she is no sister to him. He hopes to marry her before anyone else does, but sailing the high seas leaves no time for convincing Molly that he is more than her teasing childhood friend. Josiah wants a new job and a fresh start, and when he agrees to carry a confidential letter to President Washington, his life is forever changed.

In the wake of tragedy, these longtime friends discover a new intimacy. But slander, confusion, absence, and a wealthy, conniving bully stand between them. And with French spies on the loose, they not only have to rescue their reputations—they have to protect their lives.

### AWARDS

ACFW Genesis Award in Historical Romance, 2020  
ACFW-VA Crown Award in Historical/Historical Romance, 2019

### ADVANCED PRAISE

“This delightful historical romance is so refreshingly alive. It is not deadened by the supercilious contempt for the past that characterizes so much contemporary historical fiction, nor is it killed with the cynicism of pride or with hallmarked schmaltzy sweetness, the two extremes which are the death of true romance. It is as fresh and alive as Miss Austen in its treatment of really believable people in a believably real world. It breathes the life of realism, philosophically understood, into the reality it depicts.”

—JOSEPH PEARCE, author of *Catholic Literary Giants*

ADVANCED PRAISE, CONTINUED

“Rarely have I encountered a debut novel as well told as this one. *In Pieces* took me captive from the first scene and held me fast to the end. This seamless story is woven into a rich historical tapestry, threaded with intrigue, and shaped by characters who grow, change, and take their faith seriously. A winning blend of liveliness and deeper themes, this carefully crafted tale was a joy to read. I can’t wait to see the adventures Molly Chase and Josiah Robb have next.”

— JOCELYN GREEN, Christy Award-winning author  
of *A Refuge Assured* and *The Windy City Saga*

“Readers of historical romance will find congenial company in this novel’s plucky, winsome lead duet who must thread their individual paths through spiritual crises, hostile social pressures, and the lingering effects of past trauma to find peace together. Ortiz particularly shines as an observer of courtship dynamics that, though shaped by the period’s expectations, will find echoes in many contemporary relationships.”

— KATY CARL, author of *As Earth Without Water*  
and editor in chief of *Dappled Things*

“A thoroughly engaging epic debut! With her sharp, sophisticated brand of writing, author Rhonda Ortiz has canvassed a remarkable breadth of history in this epic debut set during post-Revolutionary America. A time when New England’s shipping ports gave rise to international intrigue and the ever-present threat of an infant country being drawn back into war. Amid the cleverly colorful cast, Molly and Josiah are especially endearing as they explore what it means to become family while navigating their joys, sufferings, and the uncertainties in between. And at its core, love in its truest, purest form—that sacred bond between a man and a woman exemplified on the Cross by a love greater than ourselves—believing that only through sacrifice can we learn to give wholly and unconditionally to its cause. *In Pieces* is a novel that will remain on the heart long after the last page. Bravo!”

— KATE BRESLIN, bestselling author of  
*Far Side of the Sea*

“While engaging the reader in a delightful tale of romance, sewing, seamanship, and early American political intrigue, *In Pieces* also teaches us the importance of seeing well—of seeing with the heart. The essential questions of life—the nature of true love, finding meaning in suffering, how to make a good marriage, the primacy of faith and conscience, and the gift of family—make this spiritually satisfying historical fiction as rich in depth as it is fun to read.”

— SARAH BARTEL, moral theologian, founder of  
Canan Feast, and coeditor of *A Catechism for Family Life*

## SAMPLE INTERVIEW

**Q: Tell us about your book.**

*In Pieces* is the first installment of *Molly Chase*, a historical continuity series featuring romance, family drama, society drama, political suspense, and plenty of humor, set in Boston during the tumultuous early days of the American republic. The entire series could be described as *Anne of Green Gables* meets Gaskell's *North and South* meets *Kristin Lavransdatter* meets *Hamilton: The Musical* (with all its contemporary American jocularity, but minus Maria Reynolds in her lingerie).

*In Pieces* was the recipient of the ACFW-VA Crown Award in 2019 and the ACFW Genesis Award in 2020.

**Q: Where did the idea for the story come from?**

A: I initially wrote a story set in 1770s England with Molly as the central character and an entirely different supporting cast. I spent two years working on that story, all the while knowing that something wasn't quite right. Boston was at the back of my mind, but I wasn't willing to admit it, lest I be forced to start over.

**Q: What happened?**

A: Two things. First, I learned that the British navy impressed upwards of 10,000 American merchant sailors during the French revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. That gave rise to a nascent idea of a sailor character, and with him the story's setting shifted from the 1770s to the 1790s. Second, I decided to open the story on this side of the Atlantic. Once that happened, I was forced to let Josiah Robb into the story, and the rest is history. Molly never left Boston.

**Q: You really lost two years of work?**

A: Josiah was worth it. I adore that man. And we see and understand Molly so much better through his eyes.

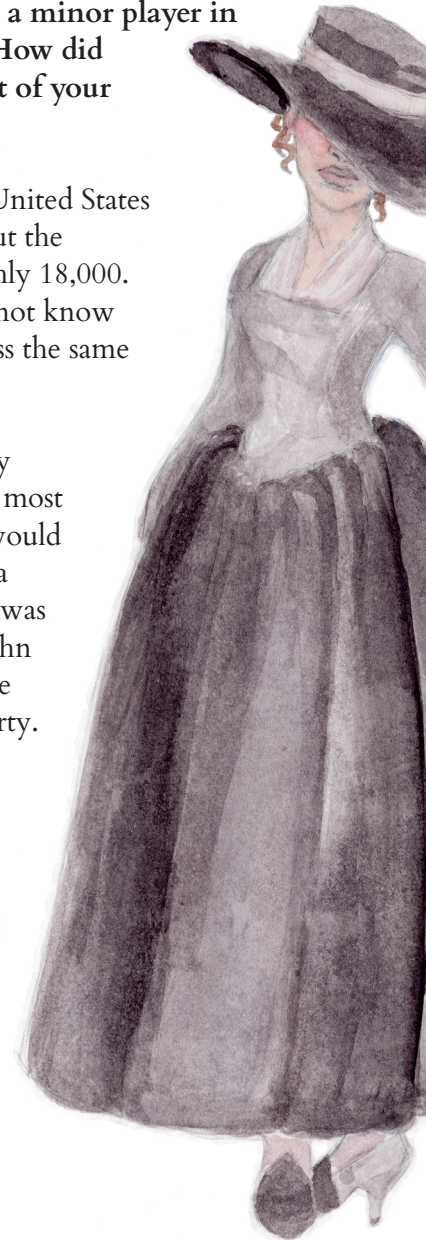
**Q: Molly's father, John Chase, commits suicide and she finds his body, and as a consequence she suffers from PTSD. How did you approach the themes of grief, suicide, and psychological breakdown?**

A: Carefully! I researched the topics, of course, but I also was able to draw on the experience and expertise of friends, a psychiatrist, and a professional counselor. My editor also asked a number of pointed questions that helped me clarify John Chase's backstory and the events surrounding his suicide, which added complexity to the whole. Molly's father had long been a "shadow character" for me, and without my editor's help, I'm afraid his story would have been woefully underdeveloped.

**Q: Several historic persons make an appearance in the novel, including President George Washington and his cabinet, Citizen Edmond-Charles Genêt, and Major Thomas Melvill, a minor player in the American Revolution. How did these men come to be a part of your story?**

A: We forget how small the United States once was! The 1790 census put the population of Boston at roughly 18,000. In a town that size, you may not know everyone, but you come across the same people, time and again.

Major Thomas Melvill is a key character in my story and the most likely real-life person Josiah would have known. The major was a beloved figure in Boston. He was a friend of Sam Adams and John Hancock and was one of those rowdies at the Boston Tea Party. He was also involved in any number of local endeavors and institutions, and was even a volunteer firefighter. And as surveyor of Custom House, he would have been acquainted with nearly every local shipowner, shipmaster, merchant sailor, and dock worker. Josiah would have been no exception.





Josiah also meets the infamous Citizen Genêt, revolutionary France's ambassador to the United States who singlehandedly tried to draw our country into their war against England, regardless of President Washington's Declaration of Neutrality. Genêt's ship veered off-course on its way here and landed in Charleston in April 1793, around the same time that the news that England had entered the war was reaching our shores. As soon as he landed and without our government's permission, Genêt began recruiting American privateers to fight alongside the French navy. He encounters Josiah while Josiah's ship is in Charleston and, thinking that he's the captain, tries to recruit him. That was one of my favorite scenes to write.

**Q: The series features a Protestant-to-Catholic conversion subplot. How did you handle that? What sort of challenges did you face?**

A: I was initially miffed by Josiah's interest in Catholicism—not because I'm embarrassed by my faith, but because I didn't want the story to veer toward didacticism. People often complain that religious fiction is "preachy," and here I had a character who wanted to convert. Curses!

Now I know that from a storytelling perspective, Josiah's conversion needed to happen for Molly's sake. In order for Molly to make peace with her dead father, she needs a broader eschatology than her Anglican upbringing would have allowed—that is, she needs a concept of purgatory. Such was the inevitable conclusion of my Catholic imagination. And if inevitable, I figured I had better do it well, depicting both sides fairly while also steering clear of merely irritating polemics.

So I made the primary conflict personal rather than theological. Josiah is all but convinced at the beginning of *In Pieces*, but he doesn't want to upset his mother, Sarah Robb, a devout Congregationalist and the daughter of a minister. One need not be Catholic or even religious to understand the difficulty of a child going against his parent's will, or of a parent accepting the decisions of her grown child.

I also utilized paragraphs 817-822 of the Catechism, which, while grieving the fracture in the Body of

Christ, acknowledges that Catholics and Protestants alike share in God's grace by means of our common baptism. In fact, Josiah's interest in Catholicism is the direct result of his Protestant father being in heaven. Think about that!

**Q: Can one write a "Catholic novel" about Protestants?**

A: I certainly hope so! Catholic-Protestant differences came to the fore in writing this book, and I would be lying if I said I didn't struggle to reconcile the two. When writing about faith, most Catholic novelists prefer to employ "signs and symbols," while many (not all) Protestant writers lean toward direct discourse. Hence the charge of "preachiness" from those who are unaccustomed to it.

Yet I have to engage the dialectical at some level if I'm going to depict my eighteenth-century Congregationalist characters well. Josiah's interest in Catholicism is owing to a mystical experience that his own tradition cannot explain—the premise is a Catholic one—yet mysticism is not reason enough for him to convert. He wants to read and talk and argue and meet issues head on. Same with his mother. This is their religious mode, deeply ingrained in them. Think of their preference for the dialectical one of many cultural differences that came as a result of the Reformation.

On the flip side, I can see Protestants thinking that Catholics are sometimes too understated. That's a fair critique.

**Q: This story is first and foremost a romance. Did John Paul II's Theology of the Body have an influence on your writing?**

A: Absolutely. I would say *Molly Chase* is my exploration into the Theology of the Body, especially as the story extends into marriage itself, rather than ending at the proposal. The book follows Molly and Josiah along the path of sanctification through the joys and trials of marriage. They grapple with the meaning of suffering and taste the sweetness of the Cross.

In fact, the story contains not one love story, but two: one human, one divine. Not only does Josiah court

Molly, but so does God. God's love and Josiah's love are of a piece, bringing Molly healing, then sanctification, and finally *theosis*.

**Q: Not only are you only a Chrism Press author, but you are also one of its founding editors. How did that come about?**

A: I was in the middle of the acquisition process with WhiteFire when owners David and Roseanna White

had the idea to start an imprint for those of us whose fiction doesn't quite fit in either the general or Christian markets. Though Protestant, the Whites believe that Catholic and Orthodox fiction will enrich not only their company's offerings, but the Christian market at large.

Not only did they accept my book, they asked both me to come on board as an editor. Chrism Press is truly unique, both in its founding and in its robustly ecumenical mission.

## INTRODUCTORY ARTICLE

### *Memento Mori*, the Romance Genre, and the Catholic Imagination

*Molly Chase* surprised me. When I set out to tell Molly's story, about a girl reeling from trauma and the childhood friend who loves her, I assumed I was writing a classic courtship love story. *Molly Chase*, I reasoned, was *Anne of Green Gables* with more pathos and politics. I fully intended to write a compelling story; nevertheless, I had accepted the inevitability of its abiding by the usual genre conventions and tropes.

Most readers recognize romance genre conventions. Boy meets girl; rivals and obstacles keep them apart. There are rituals and secrets, helpers and hinderers, a first confession, a moment of physical intimacy, a break-up, and the "proof of love," in which one of the lovers sacrifices him or herself for the other without hope of return. Proposal, acceptance, happily ever after. *Finis*.

Two things happened to derail my plan.

First, while drafting *Molly Chase*, I had resolved the courtship plot between Molly Chase and Josiah Robb, bringing them to the expected proposal. But Molly had yet to recover from her father's suicide, nor had she forgiven him for it. In a typical, genre-abiding romance, she would have resolved these conflicts within the course of the courtship. The fact that she hadn't meant the story wasn't over. I was writing not one novel, but several.

Second, I had a vision of Molly's death—a vision so powerful that I cried for several days afterward, causing my husband to wonder if I had lost my marbles.

I told him I was grieving.

He reminded me that Molly is a fictional character.

Not to me, she isn't, I said.

I realized then that my Catholic *memento mori* sensibilities were pushing the romance genre beyond its usual bounds. The first book, *In Pieces*, ends with a proposal, but the series continues into marriage, until death do them part. That, too, would be a courtship story, but not a typical one.

Realizing this made me giddy. Not every story presents an opportunity to play with genre conventions. *Molly Chase* might seem like an archetypal courtship story at first glance, but it isn't.

Why? Because death changes everything.

Sacramental marriage points to the divine union between God and man. Courtship, therefore, is analogous to the divine wooing, to grace. Romance conventions mirror this, particularly the "proof of love" mentioned above—the lovers' self-sacrifice is a direct participation in Christ's Passion. Without meaningful, altruistic self-gift on the part of the lovers, a love story falls flat. The Cross shows us what love looks like. Romance genre conventions follow suit.

This applies to any well-drawn courtship story. Yet *Molly Chase* extends beyond the allegorical to the



literal. Josiah woos Molly, but so does Christ. Molly and Josiah's courtship and marriage are precisely the vehicles by which God will court Molly for Himself. The novel features not one, but two love stories: one human, one divine. They run parallel to each other, earthly marriage intertwining with the heavenly one until it gives way at death.

Here, the romance genre conventions apply to both stories. Both Josiah and God are cast in the archetypal role of Lover, opposite Molly's Beloved. They also are both cast in the archetypal role of Helper—first, God helps Josiah win Molly, and then God enlists Josiah as His own helper vis-à-vis their marriage. The grace of the sacrament has its effect: God's love and Josiah's love are of a piece, bringing Molly healing, then sanctification, and finally theosis. In *Molly Chase*, the divine romance looks eerily similar to the earthly one.

This has been an ambitious understanding, both thematically and in terms of plot structure. I took Sigrid Undset's masterpiece *Kristin Lavransdatter* as my model for both. My humble story differs from Undset's in several key respects—Josiah is a good man whereas Erlend Nikulaussøn is not, and the blame for the fracas between Molly and her father lies mostly on

his side, rather than the other way around. Kristin is the instigator; Molly is the wounded party. (Plus, my narrative tone is far lighter, and unlike Undset, I am no literary genius!)

Yet both stories both follow a woman along her path of sanctification through the joys and trials of marriage: courtship, vows, lovemaking, children, family, church and society, sin and brokenness, misunderstanding and estrangement, slander and political intrigue. Both Kristin and Molly grapple with the meaning of suffering. Both taste the sweetness of the Cross.

My first duty as a storyteller is to be faithful to the story I've been given and tell it as well as I can. I didn't plan on following Molly and Josiah into the intimacy of marriage. But obedience to the Muse has its fruits. Beyond its first *raison d'être*—to be an entertaining tale—*Molly Chase* has become my exploration of the deeper meaning of marriage and of the Theology of the Body. In pushing the romance archetypes to their fullest extent, *Molly Chase* further "Christianizes" the love story insofar as the plot itself acknowledges that wedding vows are not a conclusion but an opening toward an even greater love affair.