

Meet Genny

Hi, my name is Genevieve Monchamp. The name Genevieve is a combination of the words *geno* (meaning **race**) and *waif* (meaning **women**). As is only fitting for a person whose name means “race of women,” I went and had three daughters, essentially creating my own built-in girl gang. I was named after my great-grandmother, Vivian Genevieve, who took one look at my tiny, squishy baby form and declared that Genevieve was way too big of a name for such a little baby and promptly nicknamed me Genny. In kindergarten, I was the last one to figure out how to spell my name.

Keeping in line with my “race of women” theme, I was raised by my mom in an extended family that was heavy on matriarchal figures. I’ve never met my biological dad, but I have had two influential father figures, so I will always be thankful for how God filled that empty space for me. I surrendered some DNA to Ancestry a few years ago, and they claim that I’m primarily Scottish, German, and European, a wee bit Irish, and 1% Bolivian/Peruvian— I’m pretty sure that’s where most of my spice comes from.

I was born in the early 1970s. There was war in the Middle East, controversy in men’s and women’s sports, government corruption, and inflation. So, not much has changed since then. I’m part of Gen X, which was the last generation to grow up without the internet or cell phones, which, looking back, was a pretty charmed existence.

For most of my childhood, I lived on a remote Native American reservation in Humboldt County. I’m personally not Native American, so that made for some interesting dynamics. We lived in a little house in the woods with no phone and spotty electrical service. I went to elementary school in a one-room schoolhouse, with one teacher for grades kindergarten through 6th grade. Fortunately, I always loved learning and had fun teaching the younger kids as I got older.

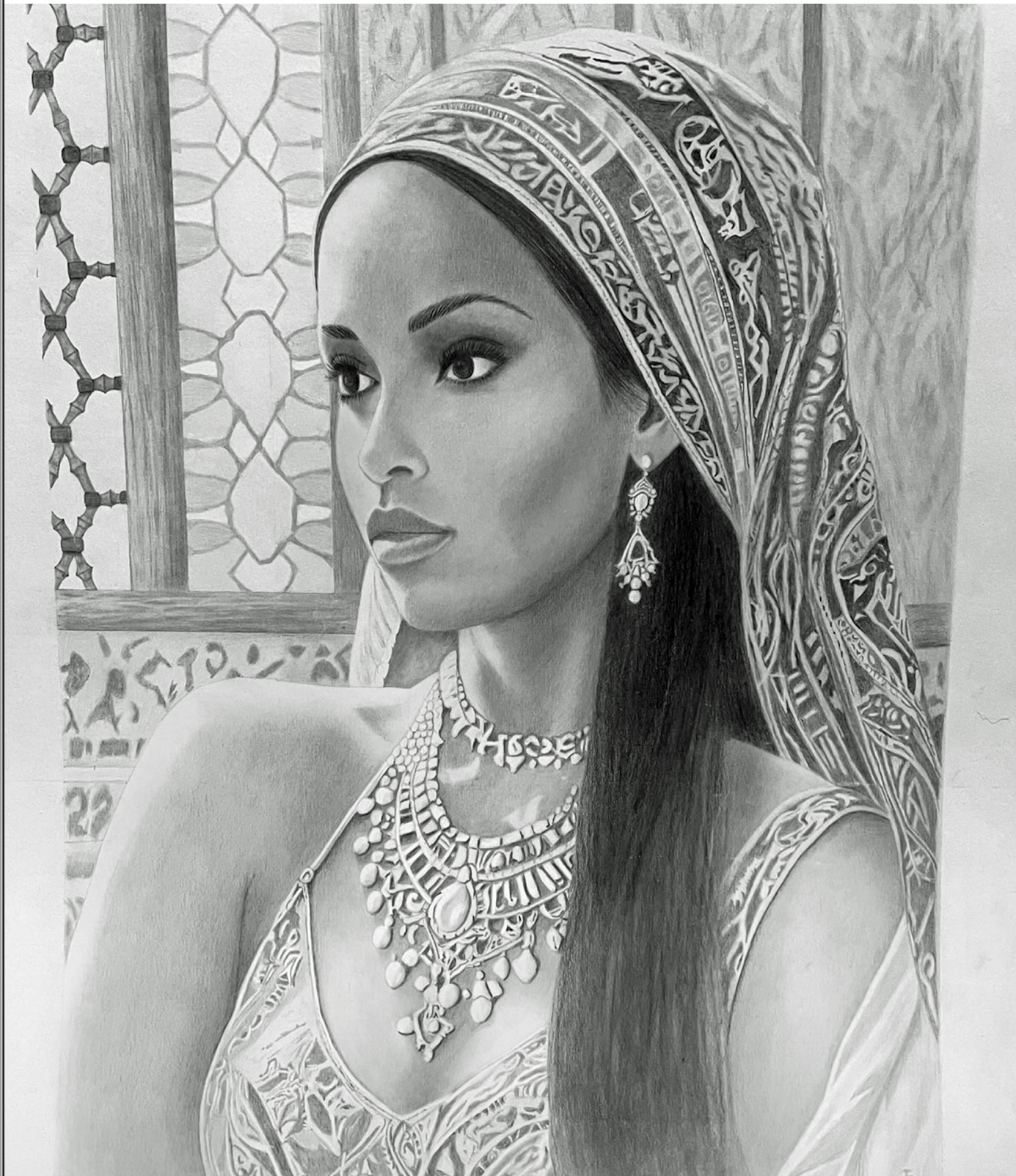
When I was 14, my mom, brother, and I moved in with my Granny in a little town called Canby in Modoc County. I was absolutely thrilled to be living in “the city,” with a phone and dependable electricity. The perception I had of my new “city life” was funny because the population of Canby was about 250 people. It’s not exactly a booming metropolis, but life is all about perspective.

I feel like my best character qualities are a God-given optimism and a plucky “can-do” attitude. My worst qualities include, but are not limited to, overthinking everything, over-scheduling, and—wait for it—procrastination. God has granted me a gift for writing, and I have three published children’s books.

I started walking with Jesus on Sunday, September 16, 2001. It was the Sunday after 9/11. God had been working on me for months, and 9/11 made me finally ask, “What am I running from?” So, I took a leap and went to church alone, not knowing a single, solitary person there. This began my love story with Jesus. He changed everything.

I like to explain my experience with Jesus like this: I was born to be a certain person, but then the world stepped in, slapped me around a little, and changed the trajectory of who I was supposed to be. But then I met Jesus, and He started healing, molding, and gently restoring me to the person I was meant to be all along. I’m not there yet, and I feel like I still have so far to go sometimes, but with Jesus, I feel like the most genuine version of myself that I have ever been. I owe Him everything.

Meet Queen Vashti



*“To bring Queen Vashti before the king, wearing her royal crown,
in order to show her beauty to the people and the officials, for she was beautiful to behold.”*

Esther 1:11

QUEEN VASHTI

This week, we will study one of the most controversial characters in the Book of Esther, Queen Vashti. Was she a sinner? Was she a saint? It depends on who you ask. Ancient rabbinic custom calls her conceited, power-hungry, vain, and cruel. Many modern scholars claim that she was brave, noble, dignified, and independent. These are two diametrically opposite assessments of the same woman. So, which one is true? Let's see if we can find out by taking a closer look. Please read Esther 1:1-2:4.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Vashti. Her very name means "beautiful one" and is derived from the Persian word *vahista*, which means **best**. The "best, beautiful one." That's quite a name to live up to, but did other people agree?

1. Fill in the blanks for this description of Vashti in Esther 1:11.

"...to bring Queen Vashti before the king, wearing her royal crown, in order to show her _____ to the people and the officials, for she was _____ to behold."

Not only was Vashti beautiful and married to the wealthy and powerful King Ahasuerus, but she was also of royal lineage in her own right. According to the Midrash, a genre of Jewish literature that interprets and elaborates on biblical texts, Vashti was the daughter of King Belshazzar from the royal Babylonian line of King Nebuchadnezzar.

2. What does the Bible say about Vashti's grandfather, King Nebuchadnezzar, in Daniel 5:18-21?

3. Please read Daniel 5:22-28. What was Daniel's interpretation of the three words that the finger of the LORD wrote on the wall during Vashti's father, King Belshazzar's, banquet?

Vashti, the best, beautiful one, was born into royalty and always lived an opulent lifestyle, but her personal life was marred by tragedy, including her grandfather's very public mental breakdown and her father's untimely death. Both of these events were preceded by a harsh judgment from the LORD for their pride, foolishness, and hardened hearts. While we know that Vashti knew of the LORD Almighty, her personal view of Him is very much in question.

WHERE THE LILIES GROW

The Book of Esther is set in the Persian Empire around 483 BCE. During this time, the empire revolved around a strict social structure with slaves, peasants, and merchants at the bottom and military commanders, religious leaders, and royalty at the top. Historians largely agree that women in the Persian Empire enjoyed more freedoms and opportunities than other ancient civilizations, but the Empire itself remained patriarchal in structure. Vashti, as the wife of the king, was the second most powerful and influential woman in the entire Persian Empire, second only to the mother of the King.

Our introduction to Queen Vashti is preceded by a lengthy description of her husband, the empire she resided in, and her home life.

4. In what city was the royal throne of the kingdom that Vashti reigned over as queen? (Esther 1:2)

Shushan, or Susa, was a major, wealthy, and influential metropolis in Persia (now modern-day Iran). It is said to have derived its name from the abundance of lilies that grew throughout the bustling city. Its temperate climate made it the ideal winter capital for the Persian Empire, and it was known for its opulent architecture and palaces, especially the Palace of Ahasuerus, where Queen Vashti lived and reigned. Shushan was a place for the upper echelon of movers and shakers to gather together, form alliances, jockey for power and position, and enjoy a really good party. And no one threw a party quite as extravagant as the King and Queen of over 127 provinces, from India to Ethiopia.

5. In Esther 1:4, what words are used to describe the King and his kingdom?

Esther 1:6-7 describes some of the furnishings in the palace that Vashti called home. Fill in the blanks to get a better idea of the opulence in which she resided.

6. “There were _____ and blue _____ fastened with cords of _____ and _____ on _____ rods and _____ pillars; and the couches were of _____ and _____ on a mosaic pavement of _____, _____, and white and _____ . And they served drinks in _____ vessels, each vessel being _____ from the other, with _____ in _____, according to the generosity of the king.”

7. Think of the most lavish place you’ve ever been. How did you feel while you were there?

THE WHO’S WHO OF SHUSHAN

The book of Esther is rife with parties and banquets. These extravagant get-togethers weren’t just about getting together with friends to celebrate; they were about power, connections, and allegiances. Let’s take a look at the King and Queen’s guest list and venue.

8. There are two parties mentioned in this chapter. Who was invited to the 180-day party that King Ahasuerus hosts?

9. Who was at the seven-day party that King Ahasuerus throws after his 180-day party? (Esther 1:5)

QUEEN VASHTI

10. Who is in attendance at Queen Vashti's feast? (Esther 1:9)

11. Who does the venue of Vashti's party belong to? (Esther 1:9)

Despite the fact that Vashti was Queen and also came from a long line of royalty, verse 9 reminds us that only one person owns and rules the Empire. Spoiler alert: it's not Queen Vashti.

WHAT HAPPENS IN SHUSHAN DOESN'T STAY IN SHUSHAN

Please read Esther 1:10-22

12. What made the heart of the king merry?

13. What does Proverbs 31:4-5 warn about kings drinking wine?

King Ahasuerus would have been wise to heed the advice written in Proverbs because the next thing he does will set in motion a string of events that will nearly cause the genocide of an entire people.

14. Why does King Ahasuerus command Queen Vashti to appear before him?

15. What is Queen Vashti commanded to wear?

Interpretations vary about exactly how the King commanded Vashti to appear. Many scholars say that the King demanded that Vashti appear naked, wearing only her royal crown, while others say that she was being commanded to don all her royal regalia for a fashion show of sorts. The only thing we know for sure is that King Ahasuerus wanted Vashti to appear as his royal Queen, completely obedient and at the mercy of his beck and call.

16. What was Queen Vashti's response?

17. Vashti was surrounded by a large group of women when she made her decision not to go before the king. How do the women you surround yourself with impact your decisions? Are they supporting you to make decisions that please the King of Kings, or is their support rooted in what culture values?

18. In verse 12, what was the King's reaction? "*Therefore the king was _____, and his _____ within him.*"

Vashti had just refused a command not only from her husband but from the King of Persia, who ruled one of the most powerful empires in the world. Her future and entire way of life were suddenly plunged into tremendous jeopardy. There would be consequences for her refusal.

"What shall we do to Queen Vashti, according to law, because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus brought to her by the eunuchs?" (Esther 1:15)

19. In Esther 1:16, who does Prince Memucan, the King's trusted advisor, say was wronged by Queen Vashti's behavior?

20. How does Prince Memucan think all women will view their husbands when they hear about Vashti's refusal?

As the second most powerful woman in the empire, Vashti had tremendous influence. The King's advisors were terrified that her choices would cause other women to emulate her behavior.

21. What kind of influence do you have with the people who surround you? Do your choices point them to your King, Jesus, or something else?

22. In Esther 1:18, what does Memucan say will be the result of women hearing about the behavior of the queen?

"Thus there will be _____ and _____."

23. What does Memucan suggest the King do to punish Vashti and ensure that all the women of Persia stay in line?

24. The King and his nobles wanted to make respect a legal mandate. Respect isn't something that can be demanded; it must be earned. How do you go about earning the respect of others? How do you show that you respect the people around you?

What was the final fate of Queen Vashti? History isn't sure. Some scholars believe that she was exiled to a remote part of the empire, far away from the political landscape of Shushan, while others suggest that she was beheaded for her refusal to be paraded around before the king. Whatever her fate, we can reasonably be sure that the royal lifestyle and influence that Vashti had known from birth was brought to a quick end.

25. When the King sobered up and was no longer angry, what did he do? (Esther 2:1)

Was the king's remembrance of Vashti that of sorrow? Regret? Did he try to convince himself that he had done the right thing? We're not given any clues in the text. At the minimum, we can assume that he at least missed having a queen around because he's about to go about finding a replacement for Vashti in a very unorthodox way. What he doesn't know is that God is going to use the actions of this foolish, lonely king, arguably one of the most powerful men in the world during his time, to show the world Who's really in control and just how far He'll go to save His people.

BUT WHY?

The burning question that we all want to know is, “Why did Queen Vashti refuse to appear before the King?” If we knew the answer to that one simple question, it would be easy for us to answer the question we posed at the beginning of this lesson. Was Vashti a sinner or a saint? The answer to that question is simply never answered. Some Jewish tradition says that Vashti was struck with a sudden skin disease, and it was the sheer vanity of the “best, beautiful one” that drove her decision to refuse her King’s command. Other stories claim that God caused her to sprout a tail, and in a fit of hysteria, she would rather die than let anyone else see it. Other scholars paint her in a kinder light, believing that Vashti’s royal integrity precluded her from demeaning herself before a drunken King and all his subjects. Modern feminist theory hypothesizes that she may have just had it with her controlling husband.

26. Regardless of why she refused King Ahasuerus, Vashti stood up for something, and it cost her everything. Would you risk it all to stand up for something you believe in? What cost is too high for you to pay?

Sometimes, it can be frustrating when Scripture doesn’t give us all the details and answers we want. But when God presents us with ambiguity, I think it can be a tremendous opportunity for us to take a bigger look at what He might be trying to tell us about not only our own character but His. Characters like Vashti give us pause to examine the many facets of our own humanity, our pride, vanity, disobedience, integrity, and strength. But they also give us an opportunity to look at the very character and nature of God. As we look at Vashti, my prayer is that we understand a little more about ourselves, but more importantly, a little more about the God who loves us and has a plan for our lives, in spite of our flaws, and uses all things for our good and His glory.

27. What can we learn about God from the life of Queen Vashti?

28. Have you learned anything new about yourself after completing this lesson?