



Fire and Ice

WILD AT HEART #3

by Mary Connealy

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QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH MARY CONNEALY

1. Did women really fight in the Civil War?

There are records of hundreds of women who fought in the Civil War disguised as men. There were a lot of women who also got involved as couriers and spies while *not* disguised, but the ones who went into battle had to be perceived as men. Many of their identities only came out after their deaths through diaries and journals found among their effects.

2. Were women allowed to homestead or did it only work because of the heroine's disguise?

Women were allowed to homestead—no disguise was necessary for this. The reason Bailey kept up her disguise was because of the “homestead exemption.”

To own a homestead you had to register the land you chose, build a house of a certain minimum size on it, and live there at least six months of the year for five years. The homestead exemption said that soldiers who fought in the Civil War would be given time off their five years in equal amounts to the time they'd spent in the army, a reward for soldiers. So if you fought for four years, as Bailey did, you would only have to live on your land for one year before you became the full owner. So, because women weren't allowed to fight in the war, Bailey had to maintain her disguise to get the exemption.

3. How scandalous is it that Bailey wore trousers and cut her hair short?

It was a shocking way to behave back then. But as the author, I have this theory about life in the West. I think the West was a wide-open place with lots of independent thinkers. You would have to be independent to strike out on your own into the wilderness. I suspect that the women, almost all of whom got married, might have quietly defied convention but with their husbands' blessing. A long skirt was dangerous and cumbersome (long hair, the same) and who was to say what a woman was wearing when she was forty miles from the nearest neighbor? I'd guess there were many who for simple common sense reasons of safety and warmth wore pants and never told anyone about it. And many other frontiersmen, also independent types, might've thought they were smart for doing so. That doesn't mean they bragged about it, of course!

4. Will there be more stories about the Wilde sisters?

For now I don't have any planned. What I'm doing next is bringing back a character from the KINCAID BRIDES series, the younger brother, Heath Kincaid. He's all grown up now and has a romance (and plenty of troubles) of his own. He's the hero of book #1 of THE CIMARRON LEGACY, *No Way Up*. It was fun getting to know what Heath grew up to be like.