



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH SUSAN ANNE MASON



Irish Meadows

COURAGE TO DREAM #1

by Susan Anne Mason

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1. What made you want to write about an Irish family?

I've always loved sagas about large families. One of my favorite miniseries growing up was *The Thorn Birds*, which is about an Irish family that moves to the outback of Australia. I became enthralled with the sweeping family drama—as well as the forbidden love between Meggie and Ralph. And with Irish roots on both sides of my genealogical tree, I knew I wanted to write about a big Irish family. My great-grandparents on my father's side emigrated from Ireland to Brooklyn, NY, in about 1890. My great-grandfather worked as a ship captain based out of New York, but unfortunately he died quite young, leaving a widow and many children behind. So I used New York as the backdrop for my O'Learys, a family that has had to overcome poverty to achieve affluence on Long Island.

2. What is the theme of *Irish Meadows*?

The underlying theme in my story is “being true to oneself.” In one way or another, all the characters grapple with this issue during the course of the book. Brianna O'Leary has always felt second-best to her sister Colleen, who is clearly her father's favorite, and she has craved his attention and approval. Although Brianna wants to go to college, she defers to her father and becomes betrothed to their neighbor's son. But she finds that in order to be truly happy, she must learn to follow her own desires and go against her father's wishes. Similarly, out of a misguided sense of loyalty, Gilbert goes along with James's plan to court the banker's daughter, all the while feeling shame over deceiving the girl who idolizes him. By the end of the story, all the characters come to an epiphany, realizing that their happiness is tied to following not only their heart, but God's will, as well.

3. Your book contains two separate love stories. What challenges did you encounter while writing such a complex plotline?

The challenge with having two distinct romances and four principle characters was finding a balance between the storylines, knowing when to pause one plotline and move to the next without the reader losing interest in either story. The fact that the two heroines are sisters made it a bit easier because many events in their lives overlap and create interesting ripples in the other plotline!

4. *Irish Meadows* is part of the *COURAGE TO DREAM* series. Does this mean we will see more of the O'Leary family?

It does indeed! *A Worthy Heart*, the second book in the series, is Adam O'Leary's story. At the beginning of the book, Adam is newly released from prison and is looking for a fresh start, which he finds is not so easy to achieve. Adam meets Rylan Montgomery's sister, Maggie, visiting from Ireland, and right away he is intrigued by the feisty beauty. Unfortunately, he believes that no woman would want to become involved with an ex-convict. Even if Maggie is able to see beyond his mistakes, Maggie's brothers will make sure she stays far away from the “black sheep” of the O'Leary family. If you enjoyed *Irish Meadows*, I hope you'll fall in love with Adam and Maggie in *A Worthy Heart*.

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