

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH ANNE MATEER

1. How did you develop the initial story idea for this book?

A Home for My Heart grew out of my desire to write a historical novel set in my husband's hometown in central Pennsylvania. The town was settled in the late 1700s, so I knew there had to be some great historical gems hidden in its past. But since I was trying to stay within the general pre-World War I/World War I era of my previous books, I had to narrow my focus. When I did, one thing jumped out at me: The Huntingdon Home for Orphan and Friendless Children. The name of the place alone captured me. I wondered what "friendless" children meant. I dug a bit deeper and discovered that this Home grew out of a spiritual revival on the college campus in town. It came into being in a time of economic crisis in the late 1800s. It was never meant to be an "institution," as was common during that era, but a sort of holding place for children whose parents needed a little time to get on their feet financially or children who for whatever reason needed to be placed in another family. As so often happens, the facts of this place churned in my imagination until I could see a whole cast of characters connected to the Home. Then it was just a matter of figuring out whose story to tell!

2. Did you encounter any interesting challenges while writing/researching this book?

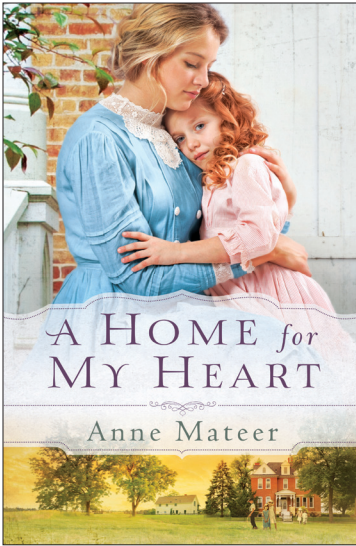
The biggest challenge to writing and researching this book was the lack of information! When I began, all I really knew was the general history of the Home. I couldn't find many specific details beyond that. But after a trip to the Huntingdon County Historical Society and a serendipitous connection with Huntingdon resident and historian Nancy Shedd, I was able to uncover a bit more. Mrs. Shedd had a long and deep interest in the Home herself—as well as a personal tie to it. Her grandmother was the Home's first matron! She tracked down some documents, including admittance ledger books, that she'd given up looking for years ago. She and I were able to glean more specific information about some of the children the Home helped, thus helping me craft a story true to the history and time period.

3. What is the underlying theme/message of the book? Is this what you set out to write?

The theme of *A Home for My Heart* is two-fold: finding your worth in Christ, not in your work, and trusting God's plan even when it seems you are forced to choose between two good things. I started out knowing the second theme. The first grew out of the characters that came to life on the page. But that theme didn't really surprise me. It's something the Lord has taught both my husband and I over the years.

4. Why is this book/story relevant today?

A Home for My Heart is relevant for modern readers on several levels. First, we have come back around as a church and as a society in general to a focus on orphans as well as social activism. This was the norm in the Progressive Era of the early 20th century. I think people relate to this in the now, but I also think it is good for people to understand that this isn't a new idea. We aren't the first to think of it.


A Home for My Heart

by Anne Mateer

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This story is also relevant in that parenting—whether your own children or those entrusted to you—is never easy. Not then. Not now. It requires so much faith and prayer and giving up of control, all of which Sadie, the main character in the book, has to learn.

Another relevant aspect of the story is the way God sometimes puts us on one path in order to get us to a different one. So many times we tend to think *God has given me this task, so I'm supposed to do this and only this forever*. But that isn't always the case. Sometimes God has detours for us that involve building other people's character as well as our own. I hope this story encourages readers in that.

5. How did you come to write historical fiction?

I have loved history since I first learned what history was and began reading historical fiction in my earliest years. By middle school, while devouring Eugenia Price novels, I knew I wanted to write historical novels when I grew up, even if I really didn't know how to make that happen. In college, I majored in history, minored in English, took creative writing classes, and was blessed with a history faculty advisor who encouraged my dream. But it wasn't until 2000 that I really dug in to learn how to write and how to get published. It hasn't always been an easy road, but it is one I love. I love researching different places and time periods. I love imagining people's lives in the midst of those. And I love that readers learn new things about the past as they are entertained with a good story in the present. My prayer is that this combination of past and present leads to a change of outlook or thinking for the future.