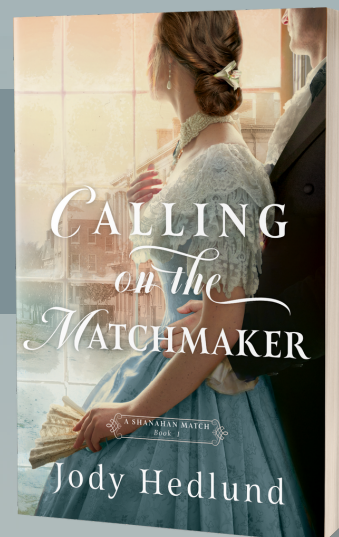


BOOK CLUB GUIDE



FROM THE AUTHOR



Dear Book Club Coordinator,

A story set in St. Louis in 1849? What's so special about that? Why read a story set there?

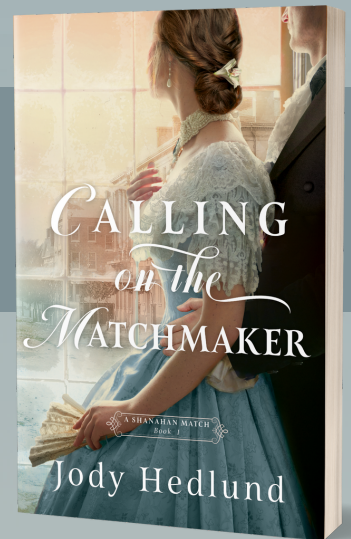
Lots of reasons, actually! Let me tell you just a few:

- 1849 St. Louis was a year for DIVERSITY. As the “Gateway to the West,” people from all over the world were arriving every day, many with the hope of traveling to California to get rich from the gold that had just been discovered.
- 1849 St. Louis was a year for DEATH. A deadly cholera epidemic plagued the city for months and thousands died.
- 1849 St. Louis was a year for DISASTER. An enormous fire broke out among steamboats on the levee and destroyed large portions of the city.

As you can see, the year 1849 was a particularly brutal year for St. Louis. Already the city was overflowing with poor immigrants, and therefore could not keep up with housing, sanitation, or employment for all the newly arriving people. Crime, illness, and poverty were rampant.

With such a large Irish population (due in part to the Potato Famine in Ireland), I decided to base my fictional Shanahan family on a real Irish family that lived in St. Louis during this era, the Mullanphys, who not only became the first Irish millionaires in St. Louis but also were known for their compassion and contributions to poor Irish immigrants.





In addition, I was fascinated by the Irish tradition of using matchmakers. The matchmakers were usually men who passed down the tradition from father to son. Thus, the Shanahan family, with all its complexities and issues, turns to the matchmaker for help in finding marriage partners for their many children.

And that, dear readers, is how a new series, A SHANAHAN MATCH, was born! It's my hope that you'll thoroughly enjoy each story in this family saga, starting with *Calling on the Matchmaker*.

Many blessings,

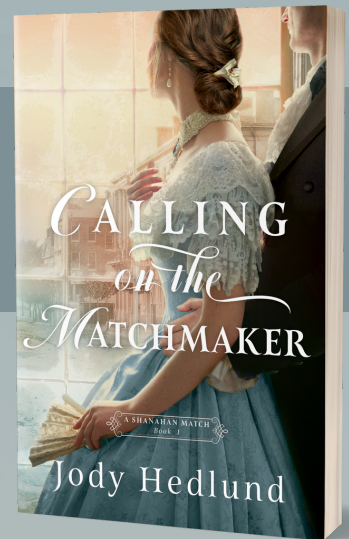
Jody

Jody Hedlund

JodyHedlund.com



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. *Calling on the Matchmaker* takes place in St. Louis in the 1800s—a time of danger, disease, and disaster. How do you think this setting contributes to the tone of the story? Which historical facts surprised or intrigued you the most?
2. Each of the books in the series *A SHANAHAN MATCH* follows the story of a Shanahan sibling and the challenges their local Irish matchmaker faces in finding them advantageous matches. What skills do you think are required to be a successful matchmaker?
3. Matchmaking still takes place across the globe. What do you think about the tradition of matchmaking? What would be the advantages and disadvantages to being set up with a partner by a matchmaker?
4. Finola has a heart for helping Irish immigrants, many of whom are escaping starvation and poverty in Ireland due to the potato famine. In what ways is the experience of present-day immigrants to the United States similar or different from the experience of Irish immigrants in the 1800s?
5. Finola tries to talk to her parents about her desire to enter the convent, but they don't listen to her. Finola struggles to communicate well about what she wants. Throughout the course of the story, Finola must learn to gain a voice. What helps Finola learn to advocate for herself?
6. Have there been circumstances in which you have had difficulty advocating for yourself? What has helped you to recognize your personal worth and speak up on your own behalf?
7. Finola thought that by joining the convent, she could atone for her sister's death. What does this say about her view of guilt and her role in being forgiven? Do you agree or disagree with Finola's view?



RECIPE

TRADITIONAL IRISH BARMBRACK CAKE

Barmbrack Cake is served in *Calling on the Matchmaker* during the “Eating the Gander” meal in which the matchmaker’s match is officially celebrated. The cake traditionally contained various items that guests might find in their piece of cake. For example, if someone discovered a ring in their piece of cake, it was believed to signify an early marriage. Recipe from: [Allrecipes](#)

INGREDIENTS

- ½ cups chopped dried mixed fruit (raisins, currants, or other of choice)
- 1 ½ cups hot black tea
- 2 ½ cups flour
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- 1 large egg
- 1 ½ cups sugar
- ¼ cup lemon marmalade
- 1 teaspoon grated orange zest

DIRECTIONS

1. Soak dried fruit in hot tea for at least 2 hours (can leave overnight).
2. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.
3. Stir flour, cinnamon, nutmeg, and baking soda together then set aside.
4. Lightly beat egg in a large bowl; mix in sugar, marmalade, orange zest, and tea-soaked fruit until well combined. Gently fold in the flour mixture.
5. Pour into a greased 9-inch Bundt pan.
6. Bake in the preheated oven until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean, about 1 hour.
7. Cool in the pan for 2 hours; remove to a wire rack.
8. Press objects into the cake through the bottom before serving.

A PICTORIAL TOUR OF ST. LOUIS

WITH JODY HEDLUND

To research the series A SHANAHAN MATCH, I took a trip to St. Louis. While the city has obviously changed a TON over the past 150 years, I loved being able to walk the streets, tour museums, and even take a steamboat cruise on the Mississippi River.

Here are a few pictures from the PAST taken by Thomas Easterly who settled in St. Louis in the 1840s and operated a daguerreotype studio (Images from [Vintage Everyday](#)):



A FIRE BRIGADE

LOCUST STREET
LOOKING EAST
FROM FOURTH



STEAMBOATS
ARRIVING WITH
PEOPLE AND CARGO



ANOTHER VIEW OF THE
MANY STEAMBOATS LINED
UP ALONG THE LEVEE



ST. LOUIS COURTHOUSE



THE CITY IN RUINS AFTER
THE FIRE OF 1849

Here are few pictures from the PRESENT that I took during my visit:



OLD CATHEDRAL (ALSO CALLED BASILICA OF ST. LOUIS)

**CAMPBELL HOUSE MUSEUM
(ONE OF THE OLDEST HOUSES
LEFT IN ST. LOUIS)**



**THE ORNATE INTERIOR OF THE
CAMPBELL HOUSE (A WEALTHY
HOME OF THE 1840S)**





AUTHOR INTERVIEW WITH JODY HEDLUND

Your latest novel, *Calling on the Matchmaker*, is book one in the new series, *A SHANAHAN MATCH*. Can you please tell us a little bit about the series?

Jody Hedlund: This new series is a saga involving the Shanahan family in the frontier city of St. Louis, Missouri, in the late 1840s. The Shanahans are a big and loving family with six children. The oldest are reaching marriageable age, so the local matchmaker is called upon to help form advantageous matches. Even though the Irish matchmaker is wily, he still faces challenges as he seeks to pair each of the Shanahan siblings with their true loves.

Since the series revolves around the Shanahan siblings, can you provide a short introduction to each sibling?

JH: Book 1 in the series involves Finola Shanahan, who is the oldest Shanahan sibling and the first in line for the matchmaker's help. The trouble is that she has no intention of getting married and works to foil the matchmaker's plans.

Book 2 tells Enya Shanahan's story. She is a fiery red head with an equally fiery personality and is rebellious against her strict parents. As a result, she gets herself into trouble and ends up needing a marriage of convenience.

Book 3 finally gives Kiernan Shanahan a chance to find his true love. As the first-born son, he's driven in life, business, and love. He's ready for the matchmaker to find him an advantageous match, but his heart may have already found someone else.

What do readers need to know about the Shanahan family, but especially about Finola?

JH: Finola's parents both immigrated from Ireland as young adults. As a result of their Irish heritage, they have strong ties to the large Irish community in St. Louis and also have a heart for helping the newly arrived Irish immigrants, many of whom are escaping starvation and poverty in Ireland due to the potato famine. Finola, in particular, has become involved with a group of nuns who visit the poor tenements and help the immigrants. She desires to join the convent and spend her life in service to God. But her parents are opposed to her entering the convent and want her to get married.

Some major themes that *Calling on the Matchmaker* addresses are family relationships, mistakes, and forgiveness. How do we see these play out in the lives of your female protagonists?

JH: Finola is wrestling with a past family tragedy that she hasn't been able to forget about or forgive herself for. As a result, she feels as though she has to do penance for the mistake. One way she feels she can make up for the tragedy is by becoming a nun and living a life of service to God. She has tried to talk to her parents about her desire to enter the convent, but they haven't listened to her. As a result, she doesn't communicate well about what she wants. Throughout the course of the story, she has to learn to gain a voice as well as learn to forgive herself and others for the past.

This novel is arguably a bit different than other books you've written recently. Can you share what inspired the idea for this story?

JH: It is a little different. But I hope readers appreciate getting to learn about new areas of the country and new parts of history through my stories. Since I love romance more than anything else, I thought the matchmaker idea would be a fun way to tie a series together. As I began researching matchmaker stories, I realized that there is a long tradition of Irish men being matchmakers. So, the Irish matchmaker takes the stage in all of the books.

Which character in this book was your favorite to write and why? Do you think this will be readers' favorite as well?

JH: Obviously I love the hero and heroine! But aside from them, Bellamy McKenna, the matchmaker, is one of my favorite characters in this series. He is in the process of beginning to take over the matchmaker duties from his father and has some different, less conventional ways of bringing about matches. He's not only intuitive, but he's also very clever. Readers will hopefully fall in love with Bellamy (and maybe, just maybe, he'll get his love story eventually too!).

Why set these books in St. Louis? Does it have special meaning to the story?

JH: Knowing I wanted to use the Irish, I researched places that had large Irish populations in the 1800s, and St. Louis was one of them. As the Gateway to the West, St. Louis was full of danger, disease, and disaster—all of the things that make for a great story and the perfect setting for the Shanahan family.

In particular, I chose the year 1849 as the starting point for this series because a number of tragedies occurred in St. Louis at that time, including a deadly cholera epidemic and a tragic fire along the riverfront.

What is one of your favorite things about writing historical fiction?

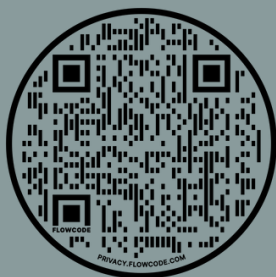
JH: I love finding and bringing little known eras of history to life for readers. It's always fun to hear from readers how much they've learned from my books and how that aspect of history came to life for them.



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