

My Heart Remembers

Kim Vogel Sawyer

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One dark and fateful night in 1886, eight-year-old Maelle Gallagher's world changed forever. After a tenement fire claims the lives of her Irish-immigrant parents, and she and her siblings, Mattie and Molly, are sent west for adoption on the infamous Orphan Train. Having promised her father to "look after the wee ones," Maelle is deeply disappointed when they are indiscriminately separated. During the next seventeen years Maelle makes it her personal mission to reunite with what's left of her family. Through the twists and turns of their lives, the siblings are challenged, both physically and spiritually, and eventually turn to their Christian upbringing for strength and direction.

Kim Vogel Sawyer is a prolific author of numerous Christian-themed novels, with personal ties to the Orphan Trains through a much-loved grandmother. Her Sommerfield Trilogy was highly acclaimed, and the American Christian Fiction Writers named her novel *Waiting for Summer's Return* Book of the Year in 2006.

Sawyer depicts the Gallagher children as endearing and genuine, capturing the heart of the reader immediately. Maelle and Mattie show courage beyond their years, as they protest Molly's hasty adoption. "Maelle swallowed, her heart pounding so hard she could hardly catch her breath. 'That's me sister she's takin'... You *canna* take me sister!' Mattie pulled his foot back, ready to kick again." It is this fierce loyalty to family that keeps the Gallagher children united in spirit throughout their childhoods.

Sawyer's villainous characters are equally impressive, showing the true depravity of narcissistic adults. Rejected by his adoptive parents, the adult Mattie explains the conditions of his second adoption by a less than decent ranch owner. "He didn't adopt me, ... he just *took* me. Took me an' worked me. Just...worked me."

With historical accuracy, Sawyer's characters make readers smile and squirm, although frequent scriptural references may make some readers uncomfortable. The heartwarming plot of *My Heart Remembers* illustrates the tragic results of misguided efforts to match orphans and adoptive parents in the early twentieth century, as well as the plight of street children forced to work in inhumane conditions. Any reader of historical or Christian fiction will be captured by the Gallaghers, as they painstakingly search for their past and create their future.

AMY FALBERG (February 13, 2008)

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