

## **Spring Came on Forever, Study Materials and Discussion Questions**

**Written by Taylor Meadows Association Book Club, Lincoln**

### **About the Author**

Bess Streeter Aldrich was one of Nebraska's most widely read and enjoyed authors. Her writing career spanned forty-some year, during which she published over 160 short stories, nine novels, two books of short stories. In her work, she emphasized family values and recorded accurately Midwest pioneering history. One of her books, Miss Bishop, was made into a movie, *Cheers for Miss Bishop*; and her short story, "The Silent Stars Go By," became the television show, *The Gift of Love*, starring Lee Remick and Angela Lansbury. Aldrich also served as a writer and consultant in Hollywood for Paramount Pictures.

Mrs. Aldrich was born February 17, 1881, in Cedar Falls, Iowa, the last of eight children born to James and Mary Streeter. She married Capt. Charles Aldrich in 1907 and had four children. They resided in Elmwood from 1909 to 1946 before moving to Lincoln. Mrs. Aldrich died on August 3, 1954. In 1972, she was named to the "Nebraska Hall of Fame" and has a bronze bust displayed at the Capitol.

### **Characters**

Matthias Meier. Civil War veteran, working in his uncle's foundry. Later, a traveler to Nebraska, eventually living and thriving in Lincoln.

Amalia Stoltz. The young daughter of Wilhelm, who comes to the foundry with her father to cornsilk. Her mother has died, and she keeps house for her father and her brother.

Wilhelm Stoltz, the self-appointed leader of the German settlers who have sent a scout party to Nebraska to look for good land for homesteading.

Fritz Stoltz, Son of Wilhelm, brother of Amalia, who makes a solemn promise to his father.

Charlie Briggs. Meets Matthias on a boat up the Missouri River and remains a life-long friend.

Herman Holmsdorfer. Friend of Wilhelm, promised to Amalia, another homesteader and fellow German Lutheran farmer.

Emil Holmsdorfer. Child of Herman and Amalia. His mother wishes for him to be a preacher. He becomes a farmer like his father and uncle.

Ida Carter. Teacher in a private school in Lincoln. Possessor of a lovely soprano voice.

Anna Marie Rodenbach. The girl Emil marries, daughter of fellow German Lutheran settlers.

Carter Meier. Son of Matthias and Ida, who becomes a banker like his father.

Joe Holmsdorfer. Child of Emil and Anna Marie. A farmer like his father.

Myrtie Bates. The new teacher in the local school, who has eyes only for Joey.

Rose Schaffer. Classmate of Joe's who becomes a nurse.

Neal Holmsdorfer. Son of Joe and Myrtie. Great grandson of Amalia.

Hazel Meier. Granddaughter of Matthias and Ida. Daughter of Carter and Lucile.

Mr. and Mrs. Johnson. Parents of Marie and Katie, students of Hazel.

Nils Jensen. Hired man of the Johnsons.

### **Synopsis of the Story**

Many reviewers consider Bess Streeter Aldrich a romantic writer; she believed that love conquers all, as is when a city gal marries a country boy and lives on a farm. But she was a realist, too, and knew that life does not necessarily always end “happily ever after.” Often, she used fate to intervene in the stories she wove of early pioneers.

In Spring Came on Forever, a boat stuck on a sand bar in the Missouri River changes life for two young lovers. The young man, Matthias Meyer, often contemplated about how the sands of time ran out for him there.

When her father comes to his uncle's shop to buy a soap kettle, Matthias is taken by Amalia, a beautiful girl with blue eyes and wheat colored hair in a thick braid around her head. He calls on her the following Sunday, and the Sunday after, and they fall in love. Heavy rains keep him from her on the third Sunday; and when he finally reaches the settlement of German Lutherans, he learns that they have set out for new land in Nebraska.

The families in the group are looking for religious freedom as well, and marriages are kept within the close-knit culture. Thus, Amalia does as her father wishes and marries a friend of his as soon as they reach Nebraska City.

The book follows both lives in the third person voice. Matthias goes to the very young city of Lincoln and does well financially, eventually marrying a fellow choir member, and they have one son.

Amalia lives in a log home and also has one son. Her life is hard. Her husband is like her father; stern, authoritative, and eager to acquire more land.

Thus, the story begins in Illinois in 1866, right after the Civil War, and ends in Nebraska in 1935, with all the blizzards, grasshoppers, drought, bank failures, and World War I.

As in many of Mrs. Aldrich's books, the climax is a natural disaster; this one is the Republican River flood.

The author liked the line, Spring Came on Forever, from a Chinese poem, and first planned to use it for what became Miss Bishop. This story was called “The Soap Kettle,” and certainly, the cast iron soap kettle goes through many iterations. But also, certainly, spring does always come.

### **Discussion Questions**

Have you ever made soap with fat and lye?

Are there other religious groups that encourage marriage “among the brethren?”

Was the Republican River flood as catastrophic as described? \*

This book is not a biography, but do you think that the author has inserted characters and events from real life, drawing on stories told through the years by family and friends?

The title is taken from a poem by Vachel Lindsay. Do you think this title accurately portrays the novel? Why or why not? A quote from the poem says, “Life is a loom, weaving gay indiscriminately with those of somber hue.” Do you agree?

The sand bar episode on the way to Nebraska City (causing Matthias to arrive a day too late to intercept Amalia's marriage), and the untimely arrival of the letter to Matthias from Fritz the day before the marriage announcement of Matthias and Ida both seemed to say, “this was not meant to be.” Do you believe things happen for a reason, or is it just Lady Luck, or the Spinning of the Fates?

Did you want Matthias to swim to shore and walk to Nebraska City?

Do you think Wilhelm's asking of Fritz to promise not to marry, but instead care for Amalia and Emil, was asking too much? Were you surprised that Fritz kept his promise, even when Amalia suggested that he marry?

Do you believe that first loves always have a tiny corner of our hearts, even if circumstances and/or deliberate choices take them down separate roads?

Did you want Amalia to tell Matthias who she was when their paths crossed in Nebraska City many years later, instead of only exchanging greetings as if they had never met before? Do you think she hesitated because she was toothless?

Do you feel that the importance of the marriage vows at the time, and of the promise not to marry are “old fashioned”? Or do we take both those vows and promises too lightly today?

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\*Facts about the flood. There were several creeks that fed into the river. On that day, nine inches of rain fell, and all the creeks reached their peaks as the crest passed on the Republican. Actually, there were two crests.

There were 113 people killed, as well as 41,000 head of cattle, 74,500 acres of farm land was inundated, and 341 miles of highway and 307 bridges were destroyed. The Indians had told of earlier flooding. After this event, the town was moved, and the area became Harlan County Dam.