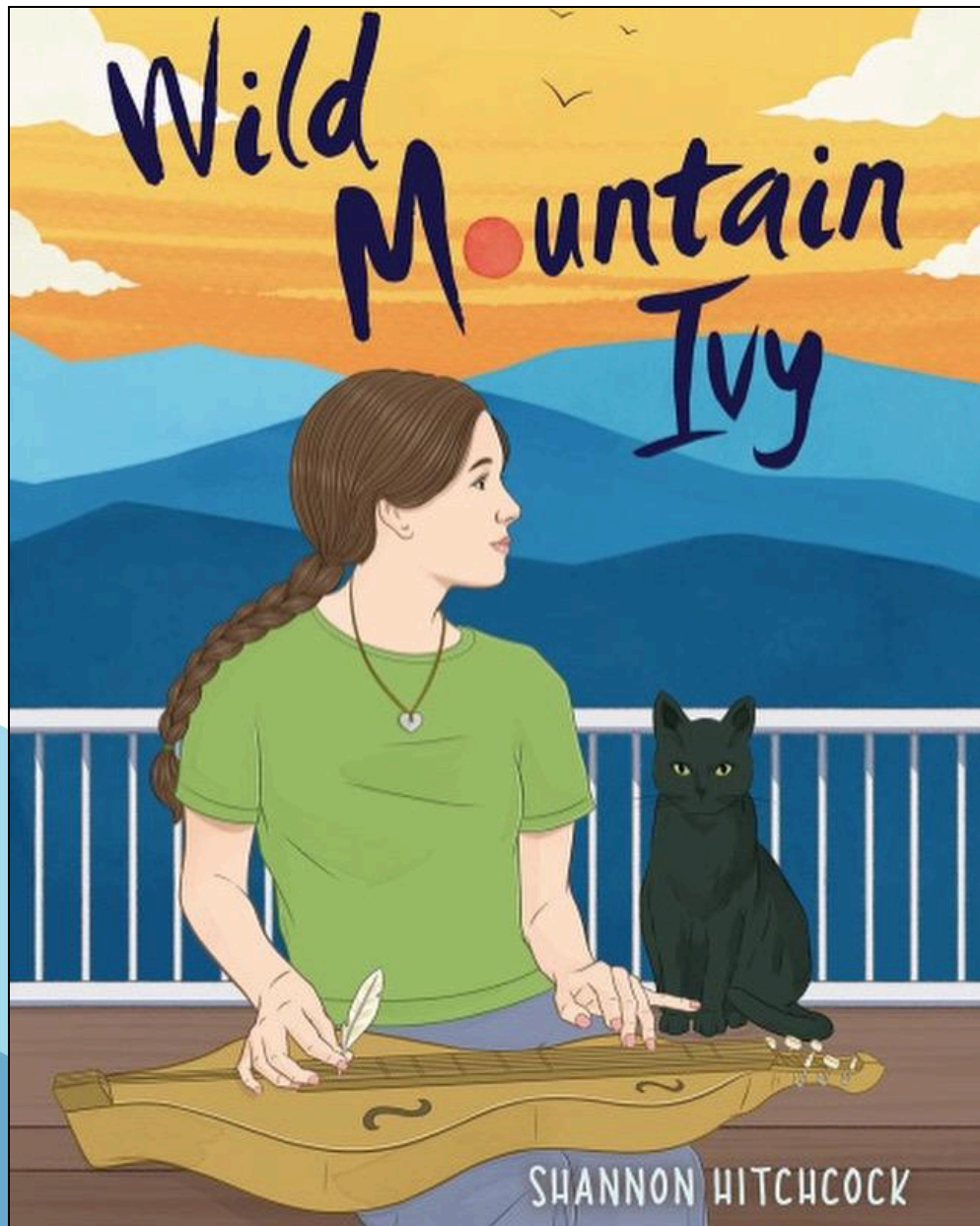


# WILD MOUNTAIN IVY

School Visit Kit



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# About *WILD MOUNTAIN IVY*

**Months after catching a common virus, twelve-year-old Ivy still hasn't recovered.**

Ivy doesn't even have the energy to play music. Hoping a change of scenery will help, she's spending the summer in North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains, where her uncle has converted an old house into a bed and breakfast. The Everly House has a long history—including a stint as a sanatorium, a treatment center for tuberculosis patients, in the 1920s.

Ivy starts having dreams about a girl named Jessie Pearl, a TB patient who stayed at the house a hundred years ago. Like Ivy, Jessie was an adventurous musician who struggled to adapt to her sickness. But at the Everly House, she was able to rest, listen to her body, and find new ways to fill her time.

As Ivy delves into the history of the house, hoping to find out what happened to Jessie, she makes other discoveries that turn her summer in the mountains into a new beginning.



**\*Shannon tailors her presentations to your school's needs. If you are interested in having her visit, please let her know the age range of attendees and the size of the event. She'll put together a presentation that best suits those parameters. Reach out at <https://shannonhitchcock.com/contact/>.**

# Relevant Topics

- Chronic illness
- Legacy of music
- North Carolina history
- Asheville as a healing center
- Tuberculosis before antibiotics
- Family bonds
- Women and girls in history
- Long COVID
- Jessie Pearl
- Alternative healing



# Discussion Guide

1. How does long COVID affect what Ivy is able to do in her daily life?
2. What frustrates Ivy about the way people tend to treat her after she gets long COVID? How do Uncle Cam, Steve, and Celeste break that mold?
3. Ivy and Jessie have a lot in common. Which shared interest or experience feels most powerful to you and why?
4. Ivy reflects that Jessie's experience at the Everly House would've been very different from the experience of a Black person like Beulah or another person of color like Priya. What are some differences that are mentioned in the story? What others can you think of?
5. After Alice's death, Jessie notices that most evidence of her presence at the Everly House quickly disappears. When Nurse Heller destroys Nurse Scott's belongings, the patients are upset. Why do you think preserving possessions, like Jessie's treasure box, is important to these characters? How do the objects that mattered to people in life speak for them after they're gone?
6. How is Jessie changed by her time at the Everly House? What is something negative and something positive about her experience that will stay with her?
7. Why do you think Ivy stops dreaming of Jessie after arranging to give Jessie's box to Mrs. Williams?
8. Make a list of factors that help Ivy along her road to recovery. Which ones stand out as things that could help you cope with a challenge in your life? Ivy realizes that even if she doesn't get "back to normal," she can still live a fulfilling life. What are some examples of accommodations that others make for her, or that she makes for herself, so that she can do things she wants to do?
9. Throughout the story, characters honor people who have died in various ways: through music, through passing on knowledge or skills, through sharing memories of them. Which act felt most impactful to you and why?

# Interview with the Author

COVID changed the lives of so many young people and many are still recovering. In *WILD MOUNTAIN IVY* twelve-year-old Ivy is still sick months after catching a common virus. Hoping a change of scenery will help, she's spending the summer in North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains, where her uncle has converted an old house into a bed and breakfast. There she starts dreaming about another sick girl, Jessie, who lived in the same house a century ago. As Ivy delves into the history of the house, hoping to find out what happened to Jessie, she makes other discoveries that turn her summer in the mountains into a new beginning.

Today, author Shannon Hitchcock joins us to talk about how *WILD MOUNTAIN IVY* came to be and how her debut novel *THE BALLAD OF JESSIE PEARL* ties into the story.

## **How did you come up with your book's title, *Wild Mountain Ivy*?**

At the time, I was living in Hendersonville, North Carolina, and while on a walk through my neighborhood, I noticed a street sign for a street called Wild Mountain Ivy. I immediately thought it would make a great book title, and as soon as I returned home, jotted it in my notebook. The only problem was I didn't have a story to go with the title, and it took several years before I came up with one.

## **Speaking of not having a story to go with the title, how did Ivy's story come to be?**

It was a roundabout journey that started with my debut novel, *THE BALLAD OF JESSIE PEARL*. That book is inspired by a family story, specifically my grandmother who lived through the tuberculosis pandemic. When I lived through a pandemic of my own—the COVID-19 pandemic that started in 2020—I began to think about revisiting Jessie's story.

When I was in elementary school, *REQUIEM FOR A PRINCESS* by Ruth M. Arthur was my favorite book. In *Requiem*, Willow is staying in a private hotel for the summer, and the ghost of a sixteenth century girl haunts her dreams. This helped inspire the premise of *WILD MOUNTAIN IVY*: A girl suffering from long COVID who spends the summer at a bed & breakfast that used to be a tuberculosis sanatorium. That girl, Ivy, is visited by the spirit of Jessie Pearl, the heroine of my debut novel.

### **Why did you set your book *In Asheville, North Carolina*?**

I set *WILD MOUNTAIN IVY* in Asheville, where I live now, because of the city's long history with tuberculosis patients. It attracted so many sufferers that a pamphlet published in 1915 by the US Public Health Service declared North Carolina to have the largest number of tuberculosis patients in the world.

### **What is something you have in common with the character Ivy Presnell?**

We both grapple with moving. In my case, I have lived in North Carolina, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Georgia, and Florida. Each move brought new adventures but also deep sorrow at leaving a place I'd come to love. Ivy struggles with those same feelings. She will have to leave her best friend, her music teacher, and her school. That's the reality for a lot of kids.

### **What was your goal in writing this book?**

I had multiple goals. First, I wanted to try something new. I had never written a ghost story, so that was a challenge. I also wanted to write a book that some kid out there would love as much as I'd loved *REQUIEM FOR A PRINCESS*. But another goal was to save my debut novel, *THE BALLAD OF JESSIE PEARL*. That book had recently gone out of print and I hoped that writing a sequel would lead to it being reissued. I am delighted that turned out to be the case.

### **What do you hope readers will gain from Ivy's story?**

A sense of history. Ivy discovers lots of parallels between the tuberculosis pandemic that Jessie lived through and the COVID pandemic that she is living through. History really does have a way of repeating itself.

# About Shannon Hitchcock

My love of stories began with my mother's voice. In her slow Southern drawl, she read the fairytales, "Hansel and Gretel," and "Jack and the Beanstalk." I shivered when the mean ol' giant chased Jack. I clapped with delight when Jack chopped down the beanstalk.



Though I loved stories, I had trouble learning to read. Our first grade teacher divided the class into three reading circles. The Blue Birds were the best readers; the Red Birds were the second best readers, and the Yellow Birds were last. I was a Yellow Bird and ashamed of myself.

But that changed with the help of two wonderful teachers. Mrs. Pauline Porter patiently taught me to read. With her help, I moved from a Yellow Bird, to a Red Bird, and finally to the coveted Blue Bird reading circle.

My second grade teacher was Mrs. Barbara Hutchens. She sponsored a contest to see which student could read the most books during the school year. I won the contest, and Mrs. Hutchens changed my life. She introduced me to the biographies of Annie Oakley, Betsy Ross, and Nancy Todd Lincoln. I became a lifelong reader.

My teachers turned me into a reader, but it was my sister who turned me into a storyteller. Snuggled under the covers, Robin said, "Tell me a bedtime story."

So I began, "Once upon a time, there was a boy named Billy who rode a beautiful horse named Blaze." Robin loved the Billy and Blaze books by C. W. Anderson.

But, one night she said, "Not those stories. Make up stories about us." The "us" was Robin and her pony Surelick, our cousin Penny and her pony, Tennessee, and of course there was me – Shannon and my pony, Spot.

That's how I became a storyteller. Whispering stories about "The Carolina Cowgirls" to my sister late at night.

It would be many years before I captured these stories on paper. I grew up and worked as an accountant, a human resources manager, and an office manager. Later, I became a mother. I read a library full of books to my son and dreamed of publishing stories of my own.

In 1999, my sister Robin died in a car crash. She was 34 years old. I decided that life was too short for unfulfilled dreams and started to write. *THE BALLAD OF JESSIE PEARL* is my debut novel.



**Shannon's grandmother's two sisters. Both developed TB. Their stories helped inspire *The Ballad of Jessie Pearl*.**

# Praise for *WILD MOUNTAIN IVY*

"Full of found family that feels like a warm hug, interwoven historical narratives from Hitchcock's previous work, and a compelling protagonist, this is a sweet middle-grade novel that promises an uplifting variation on the pandemic story and resonates deeply with Appalachian spirit." — **Booklist**

"A first purchase for collections in need of stories centering young people with chronic illness." — **School Library Journal**

"Hitchcock has written a love letter to the Asheville area: Ivy's summer home is filled with culture and vitality, from the beauty of nature to folk music and the legacy of strong women." — **Kirkus**

"Shannon Hitchcock's timely and timeless story about the heartbreak of loss and the healing power of love and family will make your heart sing!" — **Bobbie Pyron**, award-winning author of **OCTOPUS MOON** and **STAY**

"Imaginative and rich in detail, this novel flows between timelines as seamlessly and soulfully as a mountain ballad." — **Kerry O'Malley Cerra**, author of **MAKE A LITTLE WAVE** and **HEAR ME**

"A sensitive, haunting, and timely tale about the impact of debilitating illnesses that force us to pivot—leaving us somehow stronger, wiser, and more connected than before." — **Sarah Scheerger**, author of **OPERATION FROG EFFECT**

# Additional Resources

Shannon's blog:

<https://shannonhitchcock.com/2026/03/happy-book-birthday-wild-mountain-ivy/>

E-book reissue of *The Ballad of Jessie Pearl*: <https://lernerbooks.com/shop/show/26173>

Jean Ritchie playing the mountain dulcimer with a feather pick:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=phseXZaPoo8>

History of The Reynolds Mansion, the bed & breakfast that inspired The Everly House:

<https://thereynoldsmansion.com/history/>

History of Asheville as tuberculosis care hub: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/41325616/>

Science-based lesson plans for Coronavirus (grades 6-12):

<https://www.sciencebuddies.org/teacher-resources/lesson-plans/subjects/coronavirus-covid-19>

Lesson Plans dealing with pandemics:

<https://www.lessonplanet.com/search?keywords=pandemic%20epidemic>

Lesson Plans dealing with tuberculosis:

<https://www.lessonplanet.com/search?keywords=tuberculosis>