



The Past Creates the Future

according to Marie-Louise Jensen

Marie-Louise Jensen remembers reading as a very small child. She has always loved stories and books and loved making up her own. It comes as no surprise that story writing, as a career, has always beckoned. As a child reader she devoured books by authors including Henry Treece and Susan Cooper. Sitting on her mother's knee, they shared many Icelandic sagas together so she became very fond of Roger Lancelyn Green's collections of myths and legends to read for herself. At school she much preferred her time to be spent reading and writing but this did not go down well with her teachers. They wanted her to concentrate on mathematics – especially long division! "When I was eleven, one teacher confiscated my *Lord of the Rings* in the middle of the Battle of Helm's Deep. I nearly suffered severe psychological damage waiting a whole week for its return before I found out if Aragorn survived or not!"

When Marie-Louise left school with A Levels in German, French and English she chose to study German, alongside Danish with Literature, at the University of East Anglia. After completing her degree she continued to study and eventually went to Germany to teach. She enjoyed an active life there and remained for four years before returning to Britain to become a full time mother.

As her two sons approached school age, she investigated what was available. She felt that rising five was too young for them to start full time formal education so she chose to teach them herself at home. With support from like-minded families and with more opportunities to travel abroad with them, she is very content with the intelligent, well-rounded young men they have grown into. "Learning English and Mathematics was well structured but they learnt so much incidentally. Masses of History from the Icelandic sagas; a lot of Geography through extended stays in Iceland and other countries. They also became adept at identifying English and other European birds and wild life." All this, she feels, gave the boys a very wide education, particularly as she encouraged them to follow their own interests in music and sports, and provided them with a good start in life.

As the boys became older and were enjoying a more formal education in schools, Marie-Louise Jensen's thoughts turned towards a new challenge. In 2004 she enrolled for the MA in Writing for Young People at the Bath Spa University. "I knew the manuscript I enclosed with my application was not very good but they liked the prologue. I was so pleased to be accepted along with seven other successful applicants." The first project was to investigate her dual nationality and write a story

based on her Scandinavian heritage. This suited her down to the ground and gave her the bare bones of an idea: Danish fishermen came over to England to sell their fish in the mid-nineteenth century and no doubt became familiar with the English folk. "I took this a little further and imagined a child, Marianne, who sells her few belongings when her mother dies. Left with nothing, she determines to leave Grimsby to fulfil the vow she had made to her mother – to search for her father. This became my first novel, *Between Two Seas*."

Published in 2008, it was well received critically and shortlisted for the Waterstone's Children's Prize and the Branford Boase Award. Her second book, which followed the next year, *The Lady In The Tower*, was also shortlisted for the Waterstone's prize. Set in Tudor times, it tells how Eleanor endeavours to free her mother who has been imprisoned, after a terrible accusation, in an isolated tower in the castle where she lives. Marie-Louise Jensen thoroughly enjoys the research these historical novels demand. Living conditions, clothes, music, atmosphere all have to be flawless or her readers will gleefully point out the mistakes.

More recently, set in Georgian times, Marie-Louise tells the story of Isabelle in *Smuggler's Kiss* and the story of Sophia in *The Girl In The Mask*. Both are strong, feisty characters who love excitement and danger, especially when dashing and attractive but mysterious young men, show them attention.

Bath, her home town, features in *Runaway* which begins when Charlotte and her father return to England from America. They are forced to take several rooms, never staying more than a few days, before moving on. Arriving at the worst one of them all, her father becomes ill and seems to be getting worse every day. And yet, he makes sure that some papers are hidden under a floorboard before sending Charlotte out to fetch a hot pie for them to eat. On her return she finds a stranger in their room and her father murdered! Already low, her life sinks even lower. An exciting, fast moving narrative and a story readers will have difficulty in putting down before reaching the conclusion.

Marie-Louise's books are always peppered with well written characters. Add in the excellent researched historical details and the wonderful scenes, painted in words, and readers will be enticed into becoming part of the action. No one can ask for anything more.

Read them yourselves and discover how the past influences life today.

David Blanch



All Marie-Louise Jensen's books are published by Oxford University Press and priced at £6.99
Between Two Seas ISBN: 978-0192755308 *The Lady In The Tower* ISBN: 978-0192755315
Daughter of Fire and Ice ISBN: 978-0192792808 *Sigrun's Secret* ISBN: 978-0192728821
Smuggler's Kiss ISBN: 978-0192792808 *The Girl In The Mask* ISBN: 978-0192729279
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