

Based on his real-life family from Iowa County, Wisconsin, Harold's Thorpe's fictional *O'Shaughnessy Chronicles* novels are rich in Wisconsin history. They're the perfect choice for book clubs, with great potential for discussion on topics such as the Great Depression; early twentieth century farm, family, and small town Wisconsin life; World War I; World War II; and the cultural, civic, and culinary contributions of Cornish, Italian, Irish, and other immigrant groups who settled in southwest Wisconsin in this era.

## ***Bittersweet Harvest* Book Club Discussion Questions**

1. The three O'Shaughnessy daughters – Catherine, Ruby and Sharon – have very distinct individual personalities. Sharon is the mother hen, Ruby the spitfire and Catherine the follower. Which most closely matches your personality? The personalities of your children?
2. Will O'Shaughnessy “knew Wisconsin history.” Do you know Wisconsin history? Name three dates, people or events from the state's past, and discuss how they shaped today.
3. Will and Mary's home near the Wisconsin River was “as basic as most Wisconsin farm houses, but maybe a bit bigger, with five rooms downstairs and four up.” Did you grow up in – or spend a significant amount of time in a relative's – Wisconsin farm house? What do you remember?
4. In chapter four, Ruby and Catherine are lost in a snowstorm. What is the biggest snowstorm you recall as a child?
5. Rev. Rosner preaches that “the strong man shows mercy.” Will and Mary have opposing views on this statement. Do you agree or disagree with it?
6. Are you old enough to remember World War II? What do you recall about those years?
7. When Catherine leaves for nursing school, her parents eagerly anticipate her first letter. How has the shift, in recent decades, from hand-writing letters to communicating by e-mail and social media, been good and bad for society?
8. Would you have joined Will's fledgling dairy co-op? Why or why not?
9. As *Bittersweet Harvest* concludes, Will and Gusta are going into the cheese shipping business. Do you think they will succeed?