

SUMMER SECRETS – Barbara Freethy - READER'S GUIDE

1. Secrets play a big role in this novel. Everyone has one, and they're all different. One secret involves drinking. The women try to ignore their father's drinking but Kate is often called to the bar to take him home. Caroline also has a secret addiction to alcohol. She's ashamed to tell her sisters that she's just like her father.

Have you had to deal with issues of addiction in your family? Do you think that denial and enabling sometimes go hand in hand? Are the sisters helping their father by continuing to rescue him from himself?

2. Another issue explored in the book is fear. Ashley is terrified by the water, paralyzed by her past, but as she comes to realize, it isn't really the water she's afraid of; it's the past, the secrets. Only by facing what happened, can she let go of her fear.

Have you had to deal with any fears like this in your own life? Do you think those fears are perhaps motivated by something other than the actual object of the fear? Are our fears really about our secrets, what we're holding in?

3. Sisters! This book is all about the relationships between the women. In one scene they talk about how they fit comfortably into their roles. Kate is the oldest, the leader, the one to whom the others look for help. Ashley is the middle child, the mediator, the one who sometimes seems invisible between her stronger siblings. Caroline is the youngest, the rebel, the baby of the family. In *Summer Secrets*, the three women come into their own as they face their past. Caroline takes responsibility and stops being the one they all have to bail out of trouble. Ashley overcomes her fears. And Kate learns that she can't control everyone else in the family.

Do you have siblings that fit into certain roles? Is it possible to ever shake off the role given to you by your own siblings? Do you think our roles are always defined by birth order? Is it possible for the youngest to be the leader and the oldest to be more of a follower?

4. Tyler also has a secret – he's claiming to be after a story when he's really trying to find out who is the biological mother of his niece. He thinks he's lying for the right reasons...

Do you think it's ever possible to lie for the right reasons? He loves his brother and his niece and doesn't want to see them torn apart, but he is also protecting his brother who knew deep down that the adoption was a little on the shady side. What would you have done if you were Tyler and your sibling came to you, begging you to help them keep their child away from the biological mother, when they themselves didn't follow all the rules?

5. Another big secret in the book involved the death of Kate's boyfriend. The McKenna's kept the details of his death a secret even from his own family. They claimed that the details wouldn't change the fact that he was dead. But were they wrong not to share what really happened? Is Sean right to forgive Ashley for lying to him about something so important? Can we forgive the girls because they were young, traumatized, and dominated by their father?

Have you ever kept a secret that shouldn't have been kept?

I hope you enjoyed *Summer Secrets* and that these questions inspire some interesting discussion. Happy Reading!

Barbara Freethy