

## **RYAN'S RETURN – READER'S GUIDE**

1. Serenity Springs' residents are divided as to whether the town should embrace new developments. Each camp believes its way will "save" the town - whether by keeping it a small, intimate community or by opening it up to new commercial ventures that will keep the existing businesses viable.

Do you think progress will harm or hurt the community? Is it possible for a town to maintain its character and still survive in tough economic times? If you were a community member of Serenity Springs, which camp would you side with and why?

2. The two male protagonists of RYAN'S RETURN raise children who are not or may not be their biological offspring. Andrew raises Billy as his son and chooses to raise Loretta's son as his own without knowing who the real father is, and says to Loretta "blood doesn't matter, just the love." Ryan embraces Angel as his daughter even though her own father does not.

What makes a parent - nature or nurture? If a father is determined by how much he loves and is available to his child, what does that say about Jonas who was largely an emotional absentee parent for Ryan's childhood after Isabelle died? Who do you think is Billy's real father? Are there reasons Billy should confirm his parentage?

3. Change is a big theme in RYAN'S RETURN. History repeats itself as the river re-floods, Ryan and Andrew quarrel over the same woman and their father's affections, and Angel runs away much like Ryan did years before. Aunt Josephine is quoted as saying "Everything changes, but in a lot of ways it stays the same." Most of the change in the book comes as a result of cataclysmic events - Jonas' heart attack, the flood, and Jonas' death, which spark reconciliations.

What patterns or mistakes are repeated in your family? Are there patterns that have changed, and if so, what spurred this change? If it was a violent or cataclysmic event, do you think the change would have come about eventually without it?

4. Ryan and Kara love each other, but at first neither wants to give up their home to be with the other. Kara is at heart a nurturer and can't reconcile Ryan's jet-setting lifestyle. Ryan has never wanted to settle down and doesn't believe he'll be happy in the long-term in Kara's home.

Have you ever given up your home to be with someone you loved? When do the practicalities of a marriage outweigh the love between two people so being together doesn't make sense?

5. What do you think is the meaning of Han's apple strudel?

I hope you all enjoyed RYAN'S RETURN and these questions help inspire some great discussion. Happy reading!

Barbara Freethy