Autumn Blue

by Karen Harter



About the Book

Sidney Walker is doing her best at raising her three children alone. But lately her sweet teenage son, Ty, has become broodingly angry. When the deputy sheriff arrests Ty and later invades their home with a search warrant connected with another local crime, Sidney is overwhelmed. As much as she wants to believe her son is innocent, the evidence is too strong to ignore.

As autumn rolls across the landscape, Sidney fights to save her son from himself and give him renewed hope. Though her options seem to grow more limited, Sidney finds she is not as alone as she thinks, and the solution just may be in the most unlikely of people.

Discussion Guide

1. At the Harvest Fair, Sidney prays for a man to help her with her lost son. What lesson does she learn from the course of events that follows?

2. What initially causes Millard Bradbury to take on the responsibility for a shaggy-haired, delinquent teenage boy?

3. Compare Millard at the beginning of the story to the man he is at the end. Discuss his journey.

4. Sidney believes that the one thing Tyson learned from school is that he is bad. Do you think this is a common problem for children with ADD or other learning challenges? Is medication the answer?

5. Like Sidney, many women are raising children without a husband who is physically and/or emotionally there for them. How important is the father's role in a child's life? What should that role look like?

6. Can you think of people in a community or entities that might help compensate for the needs of a fatherless child?

7. Compare Millard's relationship with his daughter to his relationship with Sidney.

8. Was Jack a good father figure for Tyson and the girls? Why or why not? What about Alex?

9. If Sidney had married Jack for the sake of her children, do you think they could ultimately have been a happy family? Why or why not?

10. What are some of the factors contributing to Ty's frustration and anger?

11. What traits do Deputy Sheriff Estrada and Tyson Walker have in common?

12. How does Millard's relationship with his own son influence his relationship with Tyson throughout the course of the novel?

13. How and why do Tyson's attitudes toward Alex Estrada change? Is there a single turning point, or does it seem to be a gradual change?

14. Is it possible to forgive such devastating betrayals as those experienced by Alex and Ty? How might lack of forgiveness affect their lives?

15. Would this story make a good movie? What was your favorite scene?

Author Bio

Karen Harter grew up in Seattle, Washington. From her parents, she learned early to appreciate the beauties and intricacies of family, nature and God which are prevalent themes in her writing. With her family of six she spent countless hours exploring, camping and fishing, often singing together around campfires or as they drove in the car.

In college, where her major was business, she took courses in English and Literature as well as Spanish. She devoured poetry in her spare time. When several professors raved over her written works she was inspired to write more. Her journal became a constant companion and she wrote poems on the backs of envelopes, cocktail napkins - anything that was handy when the mood hit.

But poems on cocktail napkins didn't pay the rent. She took a job as a loan officer and fell head first into the world of real estate and mortgages. A husband and three kids later, she poked her head up from the stressful business realm longing for something more. The dream. She started by attending writers conferences. At her first conference she was shocked to win Second place in the writers' contest. At the next conference she took First! She began freelancing, selling numerous nonfiction articles to magazines. But her true-life humor stories made the biggest splash. One publication asked her to write a regular humor column, and she was deluged with letters from fans asking when she planned to write her first book.

In 2003, Karen finally retired from her real estate career. She finished the novel she had worked on for six years between the demands of clients and raising three sons and packed it off to a writers' conference in Mt. Hermon, California. She submitted it to two agents and held her breath. Soon both agents were fighting over her and she felt like she had won a trip to heaven. They said she had a unique, lyrical style. She went with Deidre Knight of the Knight Agency because of her connections with the film industry. Deidre had MiraMax quite interested in **Where Mercy Flows**. They eventually decided it didn't fit their list, but out of the excitement generated there, she received an aggressive offer for Italian rights from Sperling & Kupfer in Italy. Readers Digest has bought the right to publish a condensed version of the book, and it is also being considered for a movie by a producer with Paramount Pictures.

Karen's second novel, **Autumn Blue**, is scheduled for release in March, 2007. Like **Where Mercy Flows**, it is a story of a family in the throes of change. A single mother, her delinquent son and the old man across the street, each with their own pain, discover hope and love in the most unexpected places.

Karen Harter lives in Mount Vernon, Washington where she and her husband, Jeff, pastor The Valley Church. They love to boat and kayak in nearby Puget Sound as well as fish the local rivers.

Karen's Favorite Books and Authors:

This is a tough one. I like different books for different reasons; some for their story, others for the author's voice or style. I am especially drawn to an author who can do it all. Barbara Kingsolver, for one. Her lyrical descriptions move me, along with unique, richly developed characters and the way she has of weaving her profound connection with nature into scenes. I keep a volume of Prodigal Summer near my desk, where I can open it to any page and inhale a few lines when I need to refresh a stagnant brain.

For unique voice, I'm drawn to the old standard, **To Kill a Mockingbird**, by Harper Lee. Also, **The Secret Life of Bees** by Sue Monk Kidd. Heather Harpham (Kopp) wrote about a personal quest for meaning in her book titled **I Went to the Animal Fair**. Her honest, quirky observations taught me a lot about letting go of stodgy writing. That one is a permanent resident on my shelf along with classics too numerous to mention. But Steinbeck, Melville and Twain are high on that list.

I have to say the Bible has been the most influential book in my life, both for content and its beautiful language. I think this is where I learned the art of metaphor as well as a love for poetry. My favorite poet is Edna St. Vincent Millay. I discovered her as a teen and wished that we could have lived in the same time and place. We would have been soul-sisters. She had a passion for the salty waters off the east coast that rivaled mine for Puget Sound.

So many books, so little time! I feel desperately behind sometimes, wishing I could open up the top of my head and drop them in, one by one. Because, as you know, each good book is a friend, a treasure and an adventure that in some way expands your life.

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Publication Date: March 1, 2007
Genres: Fiction
Paperback: 292 pages
Publisher: Center Street
ISBN-10: 1931722617
ISBN-13: 9781931722612