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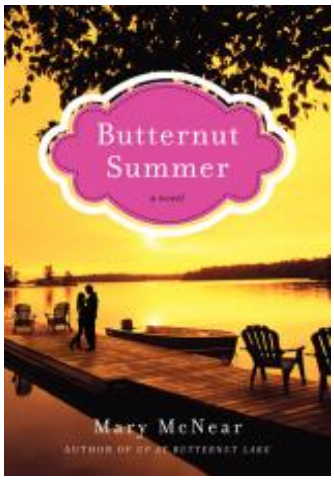
Butternut Summer

by Mary McNear



About the Book

Every summer on Butternut Lake the tourists arrive, the shops open, and the waves lap its tree-lined shores, just as they have for years. But this season everything changes for one mother and daughter who've always called the lake home?

Caroline's life is turned upside down the moment her ex-husband, Jack, strides through the door of her coffee shop. He seems changed --- stronger, steadier and determined to make amends with Caroline and their daughter, Daisy. Is he really different, or is he the same irresistibly charming but irresponsible man he was when he left Butternut Lake 18 years ago? Caroline, whose life is stuck on pause as her finances are going down the tubes, is tempted to let him back into her life?but would it be wise?

For Caroline's daughter, Daisy, the summer is filled with surprises. Home from college, she's reunited with the father she adores --- but hardly knows --- and swept away by her first true love. But Will isn't what her mother wants for her --- all Caroline can see is that he's the kind of sexy "bad boy" Daisy should stay away from.

As the long, lazy days of summer pass, Daisy and Caroline come to realize that even if Butternut Lake doesn't change, life does?

Discussion Guide

1. When Daisy arranges for a lunch between her estranged parents, without the consent of her mother, Caroline wonders if Daisy is trying to reunite her and Jack, even though they have been separated for 18 years. Do most children of divorced parents harbor this wish? Is there an inevitable compulsion on the part of children of divorced parents to want to put the marriage back together, to mend what has been broken, even if it was an unhappy union?

2. Jack, now a sober man, returns to Butternut after 18 years, with the hope of reclaiming his ex-wife and continuing the

newfound relationship with his daughter, Daisy. Why does Walt, Jack?s AA Sponsor, think that Jack is putting himself in a vulnerable position that could cause him to relapse? During the course of the novel does Jack have any moments where he acknowledges that alcohol is still a temptation that he must avoid?

3. Jack?s ?all or nothing? philosophy may be part of what drove him towards the extremes of drinking, gambling and philandering. In what way does this very same philosophy help him to reestablish a life in Butternut, pursue an ex-wife who is angry with him and maintain his sobriety?

4. Although Buster is a good man, he is too regimented and settled in his ways to give Caroline a fuller and deeper relationship. So why is Caroline ambivalent about ending things between them? And what is it that Caroline had with Buster that she was never able to have with Jack?

5. Being abandoned or beaten or verbally abused by a parental figure can cause long-term psychological, as well as physical, scars. Both Jack and Will emerged from such a childhood. Jack, as a younger man, indulged in extreme behavior. Will made a ?religion? of not caring. In what way were these behaviors coping, or defense, mechanisms? How and when do they both realize that these mechanisms are working against them?

6. Caroline wonders if she was right to keep from Daisy all of the pain and anger she felt after Jack left them. Was she right to do this? Parents who are divorced have been known to try to turn their children against the other parent. Except in extreme cases where the other parent has been abusive, is this ever a good policy? How does it harm the child?

7. Daisy is attracted to Will, a young man who is unlike her in many ways. It seems, at first, that it is simply ?chemistry,? that ineffable connection between two people, that draws her to him. But on closer inspection, Will has qualities that are deeply appealing to Daisy. What are they?

8. Daisy, despite the simplicity her name would imply, has a complex and judicious understanding of herself and those around her. She recognizes the shortcomings, or failings, of her father, her mother, Jessica, herself and Will, but is able to simultaneously acknowledge each person?s strengths. In many ways, she is the books central character; she is the one person to whom all the other characters freely communicate. How else is Daisy different from the other characters in the book?

9. Caroline declares that a leopard doesn?t change its spots, i.e. people do not change. But BUTTERNUT SUMMER is a book about people who do change. Who changes and how? And what does it mean to change? Do we become a different person? Or do we get in touch with a part of ourselves that has been dormant or previously inaccessible?

10. Caroline has expectations for Daisy: She wants her to finish college, go to graduate school and have a career that doesn?t entail working in a coffee shop. She fears that Daisy will make the same mistakes Caroline did when she was young and thereby ruin her chances of having a different kind of life. Some parents want their children to follow in their footsteps and some parents explicitly do not want their children to follow their example. In what way are these two contrary wishes similar? And at what point does a parent?s expectations become a burden to the child?

11. Daisy tells Caroline that she needs to stop focusing on Daisy and should focus on her own life. This hurts Caroline, but she realizes it?s true. Why is the poster of Bermuda important and how does it symbolize Caroline?s shift towards articulating her own goals?

12. Will is transformed through knowing Daisy. He doesn?t want to disappoint her. And he is driven to change his own life so he can be with her ?in the long run.? So why does he join the army, a plan that will take him away from Daisy for a couple years?

13. The book begins with Jack?s arrival in Butternut and ends with Will?s departure. Jack has been away from Butternut for many years, and Will has never really left the area. How are their journeys similar and how are they different?

Author Bio

Mary McNear, *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author of the *Butternut Lake* series, writes in a local doughnut shop, where she sips Diet Pepsi, observes the hubbub of neighborhood life, and tries to resist the constant temptation of freshly made doughnuts. Mary bases her novels on a lifetime of summers spent in a small town on a lake in the northern Midwest.

Critical Praise

?Engaging and true to life, BUTTERNUT SUMMER offers a story not limited just to a beach read.?

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