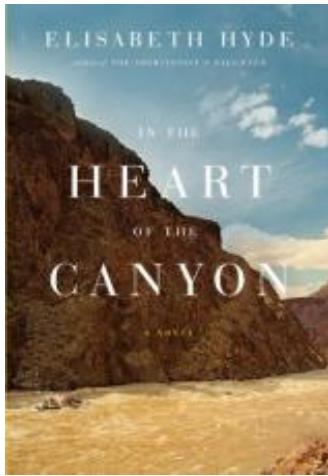


# In the Heart of the Canyon

by Elisabeth Hyde

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## About the Book

From the author of **The Abortionist's Daughter**, a gripping new novel about a rafting trip through the Grand Canyon that changes the lives of everyone on board.

Meet Peter, twenty-seven, single, and looking for a quick hookup; Evelyn, a fifty-year-old Harvard professor; and Ruth and Lloyd, river veterans in their seventies. There's Mitchell, an overeager history buff with no qualms about unstaging the guides with his knowledge. There's Jill from Salt Lake City, wanting desperately to spark some sense of adventure in her staid Mormon family; and seventeen-year-old Amy, so woefully overweight that she can barely fit into a pup tent, let alone into a life jacket.

Guiding them all is JT Maroney, who loves the river with all his heart and who, having made 124 previous trips down the Colorado, thinks he has seen everything. But on their first night, a stray dog wanders into their campsite, upsetting the tentative equilibrium of this makeshift family. Over the next thirteen days, as various decisions are second-guessed and sometimes regretted, both passengers and guides find that sometimes the six most daunting adventures on a Colorado River trip have nothing to do with white-water rapids, and everything to do with reconfiguring the rocky canyons of the heart.

## Discussion Guide

1. Reread the epigraphs. How does each apply to the novel?
2. Which character did you relate to most closely? Why?
3. Who surprised you the most over the course of the novel? Who changes most radically?

4. What purpose do Amy's journal entries serve?
5. Discuss the role of mothers in the novel. How does the trip affect their parenting styles?
6. On page 35, Ruth thinks about the "renewal of the soul" she and Lloyd feel while on the river. Who else feels this way? Who comes to feel it by the end of the novel?
7. Should Ruth and Lloyd have come on this trip? What about Peter, who can't swim?
8. What role does the dog play in the events of the novel? How might things have been different if he hadn't appeared?
9. "You name it, you love it," JT thinks on page 54. He's referring to the dog, but does the truism apply elsewhere, too?
10. If you were on this rafting trip, how would you have dealt with Mitchell?
11. Discuss JT. What are his strengths? And his weaknesses?
12. On page 46, JT thinks, "You saw a lot of Plan Bs develop on a river trip." Is there anyone in the novel for whom this doesn't apply?
13. Compare the three marriages on the trip: Mitchell and Lena, Lloyd and Ruth, and Mark and Jill. How does each couple learn from the others?
14. What role does Evelyn play?
15. Why do Peter and Amy get along so well? What do they teach each other?
16. In order to stay safe during the trip, the guests are told they must trust the guides. What happens when they don't? Who is the worst offender?
17. Discuss Amy's story on pages 295-7. Did her behavior surprise you? Why didn't she tell Susan?
18. "You lose your confidence, you lose everything" is JT's motto for the trip. When does this prove to be most important, and for whom?
19. Reread the paragraph on page 304 that begins with, "But a large part of him was feeling way too fragile on this trip." Why do you think this trip was so different for JT? Was his assessment of his behavior as "fraud with a wrecking ball" accurate?
20. Why does Sam go after Mitchell on page 307?

## Author Bio

Elisabeth Hyde was born and raised in New Hampshire, and briefly practiced law for the Department of Justice in

Washington, D.C. In 1982, she took some time off to write her first novel, *HER NATIVE COLORS*, and never looked back. She has been awarded working scholarships to the Bread Loaf Writers Conference, teaches creative writing through artist-in-residence programs, and is also the author of *MONOOSOOK VALLEY* and *CRAZY FOR CHOCOLATE*. She lives in Colorado with her family.

## Critical Praise

"Hyde is well qualified to guide her readers through this... journey... Her prose is vigorous and natural, her perception subtle, her voice and those of her characters all-American."

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**Publication Date:** July 14, 2009

**Genres:** Fiction

**Hardcover:** 336 pages

**Publisher:** Knopf

**ISBN-10:** 0307263673

**ISBN-13:** 9780307263674