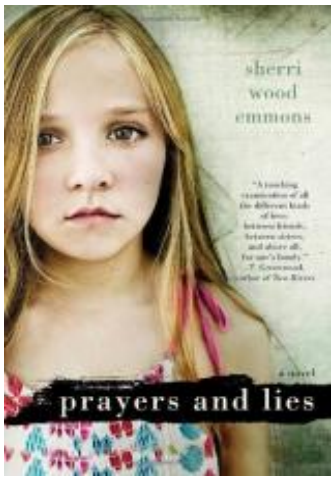
Prayers and Lies

by Sherri Wood Emmons



About the Book

When seven-year-old Bethany meets her six-year-old cousin Reana Mae, it's the beginning of a kinship of misfits that saves both from a bone-deep loneliness. Every summer, Bethany and her family leave Indianapolis for West Virginia's Coal River Valley. For Bethany's mother, the trips are a reminder of the coalmines and grinding poverty of her childhood, of a place she'd hoped to escape. But her loving relatives, and Bethany's friendship with Reana Mae, keep them coming back.

But as Bethany grows older, she realizes that life in this small, close-knit community is not as simple as she once thought?that the riverside cabins that hold so much of her family's history also teem with scandalous whispers?and that those closest to her harbor unimaginable secrets. Amid the dense woods and quiet beauty of the valley, these secrets are coming to light at last, with a force devastating enough to shatter lives, faith, and the bond that Bethany once thought would last forever.

Spanning four decades, Sherri Wood Emmons's debut is a haunting, captivating novel about the unexpected, sometimes shocking events that thrust us into adulthood --- and the connections that keep us tethered, always, to our pasts.

Discussion Guide

1. Is there a villain in the story? Who is the villain? Is there anything that makes his or her actions understandable? Is that character redeemable?

2. Aunt Belle explains to Reana Mae and Bethany that Helen?s family carries ?bad blood.? What is the bad blood? How might it be diagnosed today?

3. Does knowing about the bad blood change the way you view Tracy?

4. Do Helen and Jimmy bear responsibility for Tracy?s death? What could they have done to prevent it?

5. Did Jolene have a right to know who her father was? Should Helen have told her? Why or why not?

6. Is there any good in the relationship between Reana Mae and Caleb? What good would that be?

7. Why did Reana Mae have sex with Harley Boy on the day of Araminta?s funeral? What does her decision say about her attitude toward sex?

8. How might the story have changed if Jolene had not lost her baby?

9. What responsibility does Bobby Lee bear for Reana Mae?s relationship with Caleb?

10. Were Harley Boy, Ruthanne, and Bethany right to keep quiet after they found out about Reana Mae and Caleb? Should they have told their parents the truth?

11. What role does Neil play in the story?

12. Why is the book titled Prayers and Lies? Is there a faith element to the story?

13. Why is the story told from Bethany?s perspective? Is that an effective narrative device? How might the story be different if it was told in the third person?

14. Was moving Reana Mae to Indianapolis the right decision for her? Was it the right decision for the rest of the family?

15. What enabled Helen to rise above the circumstances of her childhood and become a sane, loving mother?

16. Given the family history of ?bad blood,? is it irresponsible for Bethany to choose to have a child?

Author Bio

Sherri Wood Emmons

BIO

Sherri Wood Emmons is a freelance writer and editor. PRAYERS AND LIES is her first work of fiction. She is a graduate of Earlham College and the University of Denver Publishing Institute. A mother of three, she lives in Indiana with her husband, two fat beagles, and four spoiled cats.

Critical Praise

"From the first sentence, the voice of the narrator, Bethany, rings true and never falters. By the end of the book, I cared for every aunt and cousin, mother and sister, even the most troubled and dangerous. PRAYERS AND LIES is the story of a family that knows how to love and forgive and get on with life."

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