

# Sleeping Arrangements

by Laura Shaine Cunningham

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## About the Book

"Here is Lily Moore at 10, as judged by her fifth grade teacher: 'Unsatisfactory...Hair matted, uncombed, disheveled appearance. Soil under nails.' She has in addition been AWOL from school for 37 full and 38 half days...She lives in a bizarre apartment whose living room furnishings consist of a gold lame castro convertible and two pink bath mats--her choice. She shares the habitation with a senile old woman and two bachelors, one of whom habitually cooks popcorn for breakfast wearing a pith helmet...All indications to the contrary notwithstanding. Lily is living a blessed life, as depicted in Laura Cunningham's unromantic, spare, funny, enchanting memoir." --**The Washington Post**

## Discussion Guide

1. The first sentence of Lily's memoir reads: "I began my life waiting for him" (p. 3). How does this perpetual state of longing for her father affect her development? What does she mean when she writes, "Soon, I became the prisoner of war" (p. 7)? Why does her mother Rosie embellish the facts about Larry? Do you think Rosie is right to shield her daughter from the truth? Why, or why not?
2. How does Etki's arrival at AnaMor Towers make it easier for readers to understand Rosie, in retrospect? Has Lily inherited her grandmother's and mother's "habit of ducking unpleasant truths" (p. 5) How does sitting shiva for Rosie change Lily's ability to confront reality (pp. 48-54)?
3. Though just kindergarten-aged, Lily is already a girl "on the loose" ( p. 15), a latchkey child more days than not, whose play with her girlfriends involves more than a touch of sex, violence, paganism, and tribal ritual. Why does this wild play appeal to Lily, Diana, and Susan? And why does Lily ultimately turn out to be the most stable, least damaged, of the three? What is Rosie's greatest gift to her daughter?
4. What are the sacrifices Gabe and Len make in order to act as Lily's guardians? What gifts do they receive in return?

What are the unique benefits to Lily from being raised by this peculiar pair of "O.B.'s" (old bachelors)? Why does Lily come to believe that "Larry's absence may have benefited me more than his presence" (p. 194)?

5. Throughout Lily's childhood, she explores several 'religions' presented to her in a variety of ways-including Judaism, Catholicism, Native American ritual, and Greek mythology. Discuss the appeal or lack of appeal of each to Lily. What role does the person who introduces each of them to Lily play in her identifying with them? By the end of the book, does she seem to have accepted any one system of belief over the others? Or has she grown to believe in something else?

6. How do Grandmother Etka's eccentricities help to awaken and develop Lily's capacity for empathy? Why does Lily respond with understanding to Etka's behavior, rather than with resentment and anger?

7. Why do you think Len is so secretive about the details of his life? What does it mean to Lily when he takes her on a 'secret assignment' to Cuba? Do the differences in Len and Lily's characters lend stability or, rather, imbalance to Lily's life? How do these two men change as a result of becoming instant parents?

8. How does Lily's childhood prepare her for her career as a writer? What does it teach her-or us--about the art of writing memoir?

9. What is the role of fantasy in Lily's life? In your opinion, are the imaginary scenarios enacted by Lily and her friends harmful or beneficial? What are the differences between Lily's 'White Eagle,' Susan's 'The Sailor,' and Diana's episodes in the park?

10. What does Lily's memorable stay at Camp Ava (pp. 60-82) teach her about friendship? About her family? About the world's sense of justice? About herself?

11. Lily writes, "If tragedy has brought us together, it's comedy that keeps us close" (p. 123). What do you think would have happened to Lily if it weren't for her family's sense of humor? And why is it important to her that, no matter how much laughter filled their home, they "chose to live with a degree of pain, to preserve memory" (p. 190)?

## Author Bio

Laura Shaine Cunningham is the author of the acclaimed memoirs *A PLACE IN THE COUNTRY* and *SLEEPING ARRANGEMENTS*, and the novels *DREAMS OF RESCUE* and *BEAUTIFUL BODIES*. She is also a playwright and journalist. Her work has been published in *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, and *The New York Times*. Ms. Cunningham was born and raised in New York, where she now lives with her two daughters. This is her first novel for young readers.

## Critical Praise

*The Wall Street Journal* "Original, quirky, poignant, and hilarious. "

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