Summer Friends

by Holly Chamberlin



About the Book

In this compelling novel set against the beautiful backdrop of Ogunquit, Maine, the bestselling author of **Tuscan Holiday** and **One Week in December** portrays an unexpected friendship, and its consequences for two very different women as time inevitably sweeps them into adulthood?

Over the course of one eventful summer, 9-year-old native Mainer Delphine Crandall and Maggie Weldon, a privileged girl ?from away,? become best friends. Despite the social gulf between them, their bond is strengthened during vacations spent rambling around Ogunquit?s beaches and quiet country lanes, and lasts throughout their college years in Boston. It seems nothing can separate them, yet after graduation, Delphine and Maggie slowly drift in different directions?

With her MBA, Maggie acquires a lucrative career, and eventually marries. Delphine is drawn back home, her life steeped in family and the Maine community she loves. Twenty years pass, until one summer, Maggie announces she?s returning to Ogunquit to pay an extended visit. And for the first time, the friends are drawn to reflect on their choices and compromises, the girls they were and the women they?ve become, the promises kept and broken --- and the deep, lasting ties that even time can never quite wash away?

Discussion Guide

1. When the reader first meets Delphine, she appears to lead a simpler, less fraught, and perhaps less self-focused life than Maggie, and yet before long the reader sees that in actuality Delphine is more self-conscious and more aware of and troubled by issues like social and financial status than her old friend. Talk about the differences between the inner and outer, or social, selves of the women. How does each woman meet or defy the reader?s initial expectations?

2. At several points in the novel, Maggie and Delphine talk about the expectations their parents set for them, the expectations they assumed their parents set for them, and the lingering effects of their upbringings. For example, to a

large extent Maggie has repeated her mother?s style of parenting with her daughters, a style she refers to as the opposite of ?helicopter parenting?. To a large extent, Delphine denies her mother?s somewhat stern style of parenting by ?spoiling? her youngest niece. Maggie is sure that her parents are proud of her social achievements. Delphine has come to doubt that her parents have any respect for the sacrifices she?s made for the family. Talk about to what extent it?s possible for an adult child to truly and irrevocably liberate herself from needing or wanting a parent?s love and approval.

3. At various moments throughout the novel, both Maggie and Delphine realize that since their reunion they have been making assumptions about and even passing judgment upon the other?s life, something that as children and then young adults they had never done. At one point Delphine notes that many if not all children have an ability to accept --- almost not even to perceive - differences that might strike an adult as formidable obstacles to a relationship. In the context of the book as well as in the context of your own lives, talk about how along with a maturing of intelligence and a ripening of rational judgment, the passing of time can also bring a narrowing of creativity, imagination, and liberality, and of how it can sometimes even lead to a person?s making unfair, even discriminatory decisions. Can such a decay of kindness and acceptance be reversed?

4. Do you think there is any value in Delphine?s ?relationship of convenience? with Harry Stringfellow? If so, where does that value lie? Do you think Mr. and Mrs. Crandall?s silence about the unusual relationship is a sign of respect or disrespect for their daughter? The same question could be asked about Jemima?s silence or refusal to voice an opinion.

5. The three women with whom Delphine has a personal relationship --- her sister, Jackie; her neighbor, Jemima; and, of course, Maggie --- are each quite different and serve quite a different purpose in Delphine?s life. Talk about the value of each unique relationship, as well as about each relationship?s possible flaws.

6. Maggie repeatedly claims that she has never had one great passion or one great love of her life. Do you think that most people are led to expect a central, defining relationship with a person, a career, or a physical place? And if so, is this a damaging romantic fantasy or is a defining passion a healthy goal towards which to work?

7. Today it?s common for people to move away from the place where they were born and raised, and as a result, families can be scattered far and wide and communication becomes less face-to-face and more orchestrated by intermediary channels. The Crandalls, however, are an example of a family that has chosen to remain within close proximity of each other. Do you think Delphine made the right choice to return to Ogunquit after college? At one point she mentions that her homecoming was entirely undistinguished; she was treated as if nothing about her could possibly have changed. Should she have remained in Boston for a few more years before returning home? Should she have never gone home at all? And did she believe she ever really had a choice?

8. Maggie?s family moved often, her grandparents lived across the country, and Mrs. Weldon had a penchant for extreme and frequent redecoration of their home. Interestingly, the adult Maggie lives in the town next to the one in which her parents finally settled and for years has been seeking some sort of ?real? connection with others --- whether through a church community, or with Delphine, or finally, with her husband. What do you think is the source of Maggie?s intense loneliness?

9. Delphine believes that change for the sake of change is fine for the young who have plenty of time to correct and recover from their mistakes. Maggie thinks that Delphine?s opinion is a smart one but isn?t so sure she feels like being smart at this moment in her life. Discuss when and in what circumstances it?s healthier or wiser to accept what is, rather

than leave it behind for something other. Alternately, discuss when it is healthier or wiser to move on --- and how it?s ever possible to know the difference.

10. Delphine comes to realize that for a long time she equated selflessness with maturity. When do you think she began to take self-sacrifice too far so that it eventually became not a sign of maturity but one of weakness?

11. Maggie claims that she?s never really had to sacrifice her self for the sake of others, except perhaps to some extent when her children were small. Given, for example, her devotion to her friendship with Delphine, do you think Maggie is underestimating her capacity for sacrifice?

12. While watching the journalist Robert Evans on television one evening, Maggie and Delphine discuss the notion of work and its meaning. Talk about your own thoughts on the relative merits of work performed for the good of the wider world and work performed for the good of one?s immediate world. Is one inherently more valuable than the other? In our society at large, or in your more local community, is one kind of work considered --- rightly or wrongly --- to be more valuable? Where does a person?s social responsibility begin and end?

13. Delphine firmly believes that when revisiting one?s past, perhaps especially one?s romantic past, there is a danger of rekindling a generalized longing, restlessness, and dissatisfaction in one?s present life, the result of which can only cause harm. Given your own experiences, do you agree with her?

14. In the Epilogue, Delphine is grateful for Maggie, the person who ?lighted the flame within? her. Share a personal story of someone who greatly changed and deeply affected your life in a positive way. Does that person ? alive or dead; present or absent --- continue to play a supportive role in your life?

15. Where would you like to see Maggie and Delphine ten, even 20 years?

Author Bio

Holly Chamberlin lives in Portland, Maine, with her husband Stephen, an architect and photographer, and their amazingly cute cats Jack and Betty. When not writing, Holly enjoys reading, hosting friends and family at their restored Victorian home, going out to hear friends play jazz and blues, working on scrapbooks, and making beaded jewelry.

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