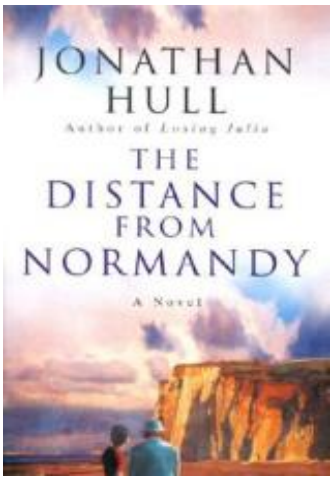
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The Distance From Normandy

by Jonathan Hull



About the Book

Mead parachuted into Normandy on D-Day and fought his way to Germany, through some of the most brutal violence of World War II. But his most difficult battle was lost years later, when his beloved wife Sophie succumbed to cancer. Since then, he has waged a private war against both loneliness and the terrible memory of a day in 1945 that went horribly wrong-and has haunted him ever since.

His grandson Andrew, a scared and angry high school sophomore, has been expelled and is heading down a path of self-destruction. Mead agrees to take the boy in for three weeks, to set him right. At first, the two circle warily around each other, finding little in common. Then Andrew befriends a widow named Evelyn, and Mead busies himself fending off the match, even as he feels a reluctant attraction to this cheerful woman who seems to understand his grandson.

One afternoon, rummaging through the garage, Andrew discovers an antique Luger, the deadly memento of his grandfather's war. In a final effort to save his grandson from himself, Mead takes the teenager on a journey to the beaches, bunkers, and cemeteries of Normandy, where both of them confront the secrets they have been trying to forget.

Discussion Guide

1. As the novel opens, Andrew and Mead appear to share little in common but their sullen temperaments and a deep mutual distrust. What are the key turning points in the novel that help draw them closer together?

2. Loss is a central theme of the story as Mead, Andrew and Evelyn each struggle to confront their own private tragedies. How do their losses compare and which character displays the greatest courage in the face of loss?

3. The novel contains several scenes in which the voices of the dead are audible to the living. Why do you think the author included those voices? Are they intended as literal or imaginary voices?

4. On page 70, Hull writes of Mead that, "It wasn't happiness he sought...It was the brief absence of pain that he cherished." What is the significance of this?

5. What appears to be Mead's greatest burden: sorrow, guilt or fear?

6. Why is it so difficult for Mead to let go of Sophie? Is he afraid of discovering that he can go on without her? How does his attraction to Evelyn compare to his feelings for Sophie?

7. Until his grandson's arrival, Mead had managed to keep his darkest memories of the war at bay for years. Why does he suddenly find himself overwhelmed by a past he longs to forget?

8. Mead and Andrew are in many ways products of their strikingly different generations. Are there any unexpected similarities between the two characters? What are their greatest differences?

9. Why is Evelyn able to reach Andrew in ways that Mead cannot?

10. How does Andrew's attempt to murder the bully who has tormented him compare to Mead's killing of the unarmed German soldier?

11. In what ways does the war change Mead and what moral responsibility does he bear for killing the German?

12. What impact does Normandy have on Andrew and how does it change his sense of his grandfather? Does he really comprehend the enormity of Mead's experiences or is the past only palpable to those who have lived it?

13. On page 244, when Andrew accuses his grandfather of being just as scared as he is, Hull writes, "In the sharp silence Mead felt something give way inside like scaffolding collapsing to the ground." What does he mean by this?

14. Is Andrew finally able to let go of the guilt he feels surrounding the suicide of his friend Matt? If so, why?

15. How does the title relate to the story and in what ways might the distance from Normandy be measured?

Author Bio

Jonathan Hull is the bestselling author of LOSING JULIA, THE DISTANCE FROM NORMANDY and THE DEVOTED. A graduate of the University of California at Berkeley, Hull spent 10 years as an award-winning correspondent at *TIME*, including three as Jerusalem Bureau Chief. The father of two, Hull lives in Sausalito, California, where he is at work on his fourth novel.

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