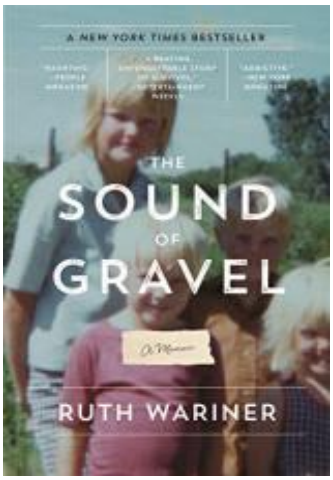
# The Sound of Gravel: A Memoir

by Ruth Wariner




## About the Book

Ruth Wariner was the 39th of her father?s 42 children. Growing up on a farm in rural Mexico, where authorities turned a blind eye to the practices of her community, Ruth lives in a ramshackle house without indoor plumbing or electricity. At church, preachers teach that God will punish the wicked by destroying the world and that women can only ascend to Heaven by entering into polygamous marriages and giving birth to as many children as possible. After Ruth's father --- the man who had been the founding prophet of the colony --- is brutally murdered by his brother in a bid for church power, her mother remarries, becoming the second wife of another faithful congregant.

In need of government assistance and supplemental income, Ruth and her siblings are carted back and forth between Mexico and the United States, where her mother collects welfare and her stepfather works a variety of odd jobs. Ruth comes to love the time she spends in the States, realizing that perhaps the community into which she was born is not the right one for her. As Ruth begins to doubt her family?s beliefs and question her mother?s choices, she struggles to balance her fierce love for her siblings with her determination to forge a better life for herself.

Recounted from the innocent and hopeful perspective of a child, THE SOUND OF GRAVEL is the remarkable true story of a girl fighting for peace and love. This is an intimate, gripping tale of triumph, courage and resilience.

## Discussion Guide

**1.** What does the title, ?The Sound of Gravel? mean? How many references to it did you find, and what affect did the sound of gravel have on some of the characters?

**2.** What did you think of Ruth?s decision to narrate her story from her childhood perspective? Do you think it would?ve been a different experience to read about these events if they had been written in an adult?s voice? Why or why not?

**3.** From the very beginning, Ruth?s life was dictated by tradition. Traditions can give a child comfort and stability, but for Ruth and her siblings, even the traditions of their religion couldn?t instill much stability. How do you decide when a tradition is doing more harm than good? What traditions and familial expectations have shaped your life, and how have you reshaped some of them upon reaching adulthood?

**4.** Growing up, Ruth was surrounded by women who could be considered to be both strong and weak at the same time. In what ways were the women in Ruth?s life strong? In which ways were they weak? How did their role affect family dynamics? How did it affect your opinion of Ruth?s mother?s choices in particular?

**5.** Ruth writes of her mom receiving a special Christmas card from Matt: ?Her tears that day were joyful, like the tears she cried when we sang ?Happy Birthday? to her each year. I cried, too, but only much later, when I realized how little she had asked of the world, and how even that had been too much for the world to give.? Have you ever felt that way at times in your own life?

**6.** What characteristics of Ruth?s early life gave you glimpses of the young woman she would become? Did you notice signs of strength and survival in her early on? What elements from your own childhood do you still carry within you today?

**7.** How did Ruth navigate deciding whom she could trust as a child? How important is the ability to trust? How did Ruth?s ability to trust evolve as she grew up?

**8.** Think about a time when you made a decision that was contrary to your family?s wishes --- as Ruth?s mom did when she left California to re-join Lane in New Mexico. She seemed blinded by love. Have you ever been in a similar situation where you were blinded by an emotion and made a choice? In hindsight, what would you have done differently?

**9.** Many people say they would do ?anything? for their siblings. Putting yourself in Ruth?s shoes, do you think you would have made the same dramatic decision she did, regarding her younger siblings, at the end of the book?

**10.** Ruth writes of the women of LeBaron: ?People talked about happiness and love, but I witnessed precious little evidence of it.? How could people speak of love and happiness if they?ve never known it? After reading this memoir, do you think it?s possible for polygamous marriages to produce healthy, happy children and families? Do you think Ruth?s perception of love is forever tainted?

**11.** Ruth?s older brother, Matt, ended up living polygamy back at Colonia LeBaron. What do you think changed his mind since he seemed so strongly against it when he first left the Colony?

**12.** How did this memoir make you reflect on your own life? Were there any parts of it that you were surprised to be able to identify with?

## Author Bio

Ruth Wariner lives in Portland, Oregon. At the age of 15, Wariner left Colonia LeBaron, the polygamist Mormon colony

where she grew up, and moved to California. She raised her three youngest sisters in California and Oregon. After earning her GED, she put herself through college and graduate school, eventually becoming a high school Spanish teacher. She remains close to her siblings and is happily married. THE SOUND OF GRAVEL is her first book.

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