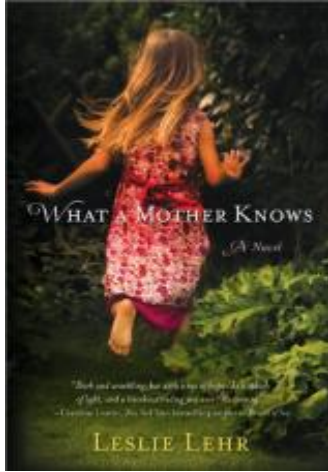


What a Mother Knows

by Leslie Lehr



About the Book

Michelle Mason can't remember that day, that drive, that horrible crash that killed the young man in her car. All she knows is she's being held responsible, and her daughter is missing.

Despite a shaky marriage, a threatening lawsuit, and troubling flashbacks pressing in on her, Michelle throws herself into searching. Her daughter is the one person who might know what really happened that day, but the deeper Michelle digs, the more she questions the innocence of those closest to her, even herself. As her search hurtles toward a shattering revelation, Michelle must face the biggest challenge of her life.

Discussion Guide

1. This story takes place in Hollywood, the origin of our celebrity culture. Michelle loves her work, yet keeps her children as far away as possible. Do you think this is a realistic objective?
2. Michelle has compromised her career for her family and her family for her career. Are women wrong to want to have it all? Do you think women can have it all?
3. If parents experimented with drugs at some point in their life, should they share this information with their children? How do you think this could affect their relationship with their children?
4. Michelle was worried that Nikki was suicidal. Do you believe that suicide is prompted by mental illness or is a deliberate act? Is it preventable?

5. Why was it so hard for Michelle to forgive her mother? How did Michelle's history with her mother influence her when it came to being a mother to Nikki?
6. Michelle's hopes for her daughter changed from wanting her to be wildly successful to just wanting her to be happy. How do you think this compares with other parents? Do you think she was wrong?
7. Why did the author include Michelle's run-in at the DMV with a perfect mother whose tennis champ son became a junkie?
8. When Michelle wonders who she is without her daughter, she is talking about a large part of her identity. How do you think our identities are linked to our familial relationships?
9. Becca knows that the reason Michelle can't reach her friend Sasha is because Sasha is with Michelle's husband. Is she being a good friend by not telling her or a bad one?
10. How were Julie and Cathy both allies to Michelle? How did they also hurt her?
11. Many parents travel for business, but the film business is known for location affairs. How does this change the character of the mothers at home? Do you think it contributed to the weakening of Michelle's marriage?
12. When Michelle says she couldn't afford to miss Drew, what did she mean?
13. Why did Dr. Palmer value the very qualities in Michelle that threatened Drew?
14. Lexi notes that Michelle finds it "easier to blame" herself than to accept all the things that are out of her control. Why is this true for Michelle? Have you ever felt this way?
15. Elyse tells Michelle that Nikki is a mystery, but she offers hints as to her whereabouts. Why doesn't she tell Michelle the truth?
16. The mothers in this story - Michelle, Elyse, Julie, Cathy, and Noah's mother - all took unethical actions to protect their families. What do these women have in common? How do they differ?
17. Do you believe what Elyse says, that there are no accidents?
18. How did Michelle's relationship with her son end up being the turning point in her testimony?
19. What is Michelle's true need? How is it different from her desire in this story? How are they related?
20. When Nikki ran away, the places where she spent time tended to be places where her family had vacationed. What does this say about Nikki?

21. Noah's mother was Jewish but worked at a Catholic hospital. What does this tell us about her character, and how is it reflected later by her actions?

22. How do the symbols of the turtle and the starfish represent Michelle's character growth?

23. Cake is a symbol that even the author was unaware of until the story was complete. The confection is featured at both the beginning, the end, and in a different but significant event

24. Which character do you most identify with and why?

25. How far would you go to protect your child?

Author Bio

Leslie Lehr is a prize-winning author, screenwriter, and essayist who grew up in Ohio.

After graduating from USC's School of Cinematic Arts with a Student Emmy in hand, she spent several years in film production, rising to be the West Coast Production Manager of a commercial and music-video company, then went freelance to work on feature films. Once a mother, Lehr started writing seriously. Her humorous essays evolved into her first book, **Welcome to Club Mom: The End of Life As You Know It** - but the publisher changed the subtitle to **The Adventure Begins**. And it did.....

The what-ifs of modern motherhood drove Lehr to fiction soon after, and the result was her debut novel, *66 Laps*, winner of the Pirates Alley Faulkner Society Gold Medal. Soon after, her screenplay, *Heartless*, was produced as an independent film. The romantic thriller financed five other films for Santa Monica Pictures, aired on USA TV and has been screening in Europe for over six years. Her next books were the nonfiction tomes, **The Happy Helpful Grandma Guide**, excerpted on FisherPrice.com; and **Wendy Bellissimo: Nesting**, featured on Oprah. Her novel, **Wife Goes On**, was a featured selection for the Pulpwood Queens Book clubs, with 250 chapters of tiara-wearing, book-sharing readers.

Lehr's essay in **Mommy Wars**, "I Hate Everybody" was lauded on the "Today Show". "Parenting Paranoia" was excerpted in Arianna Huffington's bestseller, **On Becoming Fearless**. Her novel, **Wife Goes On**, was inspired by her essay, "Welcome to the Club" in the anthology, **The Honeymoon's Over**. Lehr is a contributor to the Tarcher/Penguin Series "Now Write" and also a blogger over at *The Huffington Post*.

With a B.A. from the USC School of Cinematic Arts and an MFA in Creative Writing from Antioch University, Lehr is a popular panelist at literary and film conferences around the country. She is a member of PEN, The Authors Guild, WGA, Women In Film, and The Women's Leadership Council of L.A. In addition to private manuscript consulting, she has mentored many writers to publication in her novel writing classes in the world-renowned Writer's Program at UCLA Extension.

On the personal side, she is currently incognito as Chemo Chick in Karen Rinehart's breast cancer blog, Sick of Pink. Lehr has two daughters and lives in Southern California.

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