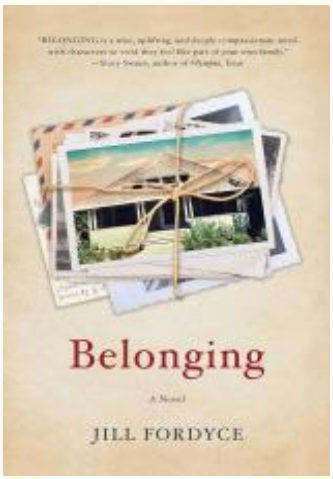
# Belonging

by Jill Fordyce




## About the Book

**Appealing to readers of Delia Owens? WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING, Kristin Hannah?s FIREFLY LANE and Ann Packer?s THE DIVE FROM CLAUSEN'S PIER, BELONGING is a heartbreaking and hopeful coming-of-age story that traverses lifelong friendship, first love and a young woman?s fierce desire to transcend her traumatic childhood.**

Jenny is 13 when an epic dust storm rolls into her central California town in December 1977. Bedridden after contracting a life-threatening illness in the storm and suffering a shocking loss, Jenny realizes she will never be cared for by the mother who both neglects and terrifies her or the father who allows it. She relies on her cousin, Heather, who has the loving home Jenny longs for; her beloved great-uncle, Gino, the last link between generations; her best friend, Henry, a free spirit with whom she shares an inexplicable bond; and earnest baseball star, Billy, who becomes her first love.

After a stunning turn of events in both their lives, Jenny and Henry leave for college in LA together in the summer of 1982 --- Jenny fleeing a broken heart, and Henry running from something he can?t reveal, even to his best friend. When she returns home years later, the life Jenny so carefully created collides with the one she left behind.

Spanning three decades, BELONGING is about first love and heartbreak, friendship and secrets, family and forgiveness, hometowns and coming of age, and memory and music. The heart of the story is Jenny?s struggle to undo the binds of a childhood that have deeply affected her life, the painful path to love endured by children raised in alcoholic families, and the grim reality of believing you must hide a part of yourself in order to belong.

## Discussion Guide

**1.** How does the town of Bakersfield, California, its music and immigrant history become part of this story?

**2.** The theme of belonging to a place, a faith, a family is central to the novel. As a reader, does this theme resonate with you? How does it relate to your own life?

**3.** When Bakersfield experiences the epic dust storm and Jenny comes down with valley fever, how does this experience change Jenny?s life?

**4.** Are there any metaphors you see from both the dust storm and the valley fever, as they relate to Jenny?s life?

**5.** Nonna and Uncle Gino take care of Jenny as she is growing up. What does she learn from them?

**6.** The parents of Billy, Jenny and Henry play an important role in this story. Do their families influence the choices they make?

**7.** What advice do these friends offer each other at critical times in their lives?

**8.** Billy and Jenny declare their love for each other as teenagers and meet up again some years later. What challenges do they face as they reclaim their love for each other?

**9.** Janice, Jenny?s mother, is a difficult person. Does that cause Jenny to doubt herself? How does that show up in the story?

**10.** How does Jenny?s father react to Janice, her demands and being a father to Jenny?

**11.** Henry and Billy are the two most important people in Jenny?s life, but they are so different. What is it about each of them that appeals to her?

**12.** Why is it that Billy doesn?t really know how important Henry is to her? Is she keeping that a secret? If so, why?

**13.** When Uncle Gino is dying and finally gives Jenny some important letters, he asks for forgiveness. Why does she grant that wish?

**14.** How do the letters free Jenny and help her to regain her sense of belonging?

## Author Bio

Jill Fordyce was born and raised in Bakersfield, California. She received a degree in English from the University of Southern California and a law degree from Santa Clara University. While practicing law, she continued to study writing through the Stanford Continuing Education creative writing program. BELONGING is her debut novel. She and her husband, Craig, have five adult children, and live in California and Tennessee.

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