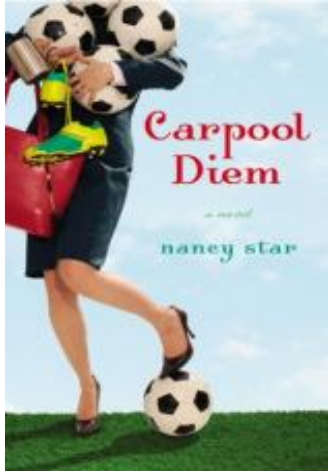


Carpool Diem

by Nancy Star



About the Book

Annie Fleming's family has adjusted well to her hard driving career. How could they not? Annie keeps her husband, daughter, and babysitter in line with typed, edited, and proofed To-Do and Not-To-Do lists. (No TV on school nights, please!).

But when an obnoxious coworker conspires to force Annie out of her job, she finds herself not only out of work, but face-to-face with a family that isn't quite as well adjusted as she'd thought. For one thing, husband Tim has been traveling more than usual, and he's not always where he says he'll be. Worse, daughter Charlotte is showing little interest in joining the Lightning Bolts --- a legendary, elite, work-till-you-drop soccer team run by Winslow West, a man who dreams of the Olympic gold his young charges will someday win for him. How could Annie, undefeated even when unemployed, have a daughter with a quitting attitude? Now, Annie is determined to do whatever it takes to get Charlotte on the A team, but the soccer sidelines turn out to be more cutthroat than the corporate boardroom ever was.

Is it possible Annie's "Plan Hard/Work Hard" credo isn't the key to success after all?

Discussion Guide

1. When we first meet Annie, she thinks her hectic life is under control. Then everything falls apart. What in Annie's personality helps explain how she ends up so blindsided at work and at home? Have you ever felt blindsided?
2. Because she's living away during the workweek, Annie feels disconnected from her life at home, and from her daughter. Watching Charlotte's affectionate interaction with Hildy makes Annie feel even worse. Given that Charlotte is so attached to her babysitter, should Annie have tried harder to make things work? Is being jealous of our children's relationships with their caregivers an unavoidable fact of life?

3. Charlotte is fine with the prospect of being on a C team but Annie isn't. Annie worries that if Charlotte is content with a C team she might be content with a C life. What would a C life be, to someone like Annie? What is the relationship between the level of competitiveness of a kid's team-or any extra-curricular activity-and success in later life?
4. Annie wants to encourage Charlotte to be the best she can be. At what point does this go from being supportive to overstepping? How far is too far when pushing your kid?
5. Trissy is always helpful and supportive to Annie, but because Trissy seems so perfect, Annie feels like a failure whenever she's around her. Do you think Trissy feels perfect? Is there a "perfect mom" where you live? What qualities make a mom seem annoyingly perfect?
6. After the soccer kick-off meeting, Annie wonders if it's possible that she's finally broken the code of the clan of the soccer mom. Is there a code? Why is it that some people seem to understand the unwritten rules while others don't?
7. The Power Pointers News of the Day bulletins change over time. Do you think the early newsletters are a good motivational tool for Winslow's team? What about the later newsletters? Have you ever received anything like the Power Pointers?
8. Despite Winslow's promises, Roy's daughter, Nadine, is not moved up to the A team. His wife thinks they've been blackballed. Why do you think Nadine is denied advancement? Are kids ever held back because of their parents' bad behavior? Some of the team parents make fun of Roy's profession. Does class play a part in team politics?
9. Winslow worries that parents posting comments on the soccer forum will create an atmosphere of pettiness and jealousy. Is it a legitimate decision for him to ban team parents from posting on a Website? If players are expected to listen to their coach's rules, does that mean parents need to comply in the same way? What if a parent believes some of the coach's rules are unreasonable?
10. Vicki and Winslow feel under siege by demanding and demented parents who are always angling to improve their kid's opportunities. Do you think this makes Winslow and Vicki's behavior understandable? Reasonable? Forgivable? Have you ever had an experience with a crazy parent on the sidelines? Has there ever been a crazy coach in charge of your kid's team? What happened?
11. The PC&B management team tells Annie they see their company as a family. Parents on the Asteroids and the Power talk about how their teams are like a family too. Discuss the similarities and differences between Winslow's expectations of Charlotte and her teammates, and the expectations Annie encounters working at PC&B and, on her own, for Sondra.
12. When Charlotte tells her mother that Winslow is disappointed with the team for not playing hard enough, Annie asks if she's having any fun. Is there an age at which "fun" becomes less important? Is it ever okay for there to be no fun?
13. At lunch with Roxanne, Annie learns that some of the qualities that make her a good mother turn out to be valuable skills at work. Do abilities used to manage a staff translate to managing children? Do techniques that work at home, work at work? Why is it that so many people feel as if what goes on in the worlds of work and home must be kept secret from each other?

14. Winslow is impressed that Charlotte has a plan for every day of the week so she can improve her soccer skills. Having a plan of the day is something Charlotte learned from watching her mother. Is this lesson a good thing? What else has Charlotte learned from Annie? What has Annie learned from Charlotte?

Author Bio

Nancy Star is the author of four novels: **Carpool Diem**, **Up Next**, **Now This** and **Buried Lives**. Her very first published book was a travel guide about tipping around the world called, **The International Guide to Tipping**. That was long enough ago that she now promises you know as much on that subject as she does.

Her books have been translated into French, Japanese, German and Dutch. Her first novel, **Buried Lives**, was optioned for TV, and she hasn't given up hope that someday some smart TV producer will actually adapt it for the screen.

In addition to her adult novels, Nancy is the author of an eight-book children's mystery series for young readers called *The Calendar Club*, published by Scholastic Books. As a children's book writer she has been delighted to discover that young readers, in fact entire classrooms of young readers, love to write letters to their favorite authors telling them exactly what they think about the books.

Before her career as a writer, Nancy worked for over a decade in the movie business. At The Samuel Goldwyn Company, and before that at The Ladd Company, she scouted for books, plays, treatments, screenplays, graffiti, haikus, dreams --- anything --- that might make a good movie. She also searched for independent films to acquire and did lots of other fun stuff including her personal favorite, supervising the dubbing of a charming Scottish movie into a charming Scottish movie that American ears could actually understand.

Nancy really liked working in the movie business but she sometimes got into trouble because she always sided with the writers. Finally, it was clear she had to go over to the other side and become one of them herself. That was a good thing, because that's all she ever wanted to do anyway.

Nancy now lives in New Jersey with her wonderful husband, her two amazing daughters and her faithful dog.

To her **Carpool Diem** readers she will admit to having spent more than her share of Sundays cheering at the sidelines of her daughters' soccer games. But never once has she ever yelled, "Attack", "Get her", or "Kill them."

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