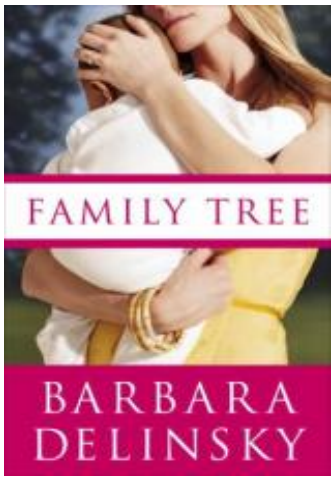
Family Tree

by Barbara Delinsky



About the Book

Dana Clarke has always longed for the stability of home and family --- her own childhood was not an easy one. Now she has married a man she adores who is from a prominent New England family, and she is about to give birth to their first child. But what should be the happiest day of her life becomes the day her world falls apart. Her daughter is born beautiful and healthy, but no one can help noticing the African American traits in her appearance. Dana?s husband, to her great shock and dismay, begins to worry that people will think Dana has had an affair.

The only way to repair the damage done is for Dana to track down the father she never knew and to explore the possibility of African American lineage in his family history. Dana?s determination to discover the truth becomes a poignant journey back through her past and her husband?s heritage that unearths secrets rooted in prejudice and fear.

Barbara Delinsky?s **Family Tree** is an utterly unforgettable novel that asks penetrating questions about race, family, and the choices people make in times of crisis --- choices that have profound consequences that can last for generations.

Discussion Guide

1. What were your initial theories about Lizzie?s ancestors? Did you ever doubt Dana?s fidelity?

2. How would you have reacted if you had experienced Dana and Hugh?s situation? How would your circle of friends and coworkers have reacted?

3. Discuss the parallel stories woven throughout the novel, including Dana?s painful reunion with her father, Ellie Jo?s secret regarding her husband?s other marriage, and Crystal?s paternity case against the senator. What are the common threads within these family secrets? What ultimately brings healing to some of the parties involved?

4. Crystal?s dilemma raises timely questions about the obligations of men who father children out of wedlock. Are Senator Hutchinson?s obligations to Jay the same as Jack Kettyle?s obligations to Dana? Should men always be financially obligated to their children, regardless of the circumstances? If so, what should those financial obligations be?

5. Why is it so difficult for Dana to feel anything but anger toward her father? In your opinion, did he do anything wrong? How does she cope with the shifting image of her mother?

6. What is the root of Hugh?s reaction in the novel?s initial chapters? Is he a racist? Is he torn between loyalties? Does he trust his wife?

7. Is your own ancestry homogenous? If not, what interesting or ironic histories are present in your ancestry? Do you believe it?s important to maintain homogeneity in a family tree? If you were to adopt a child, what would be your main criterion in selecting him or her?

8. Discuss the many differences between Dana?s and Hugh?s families. What drew Dana and Hugh to each other? To what extent is financial power a factor in shaping their attitudes toward the world? What common ground existed despite their tremendous differences in background?

9. What accounts for the universal fascination with genealogy? Should a person be lauded for the accomplishments of an ancestor, or snubbed for the misdeeds of one? Is genealogy a predictor?

10. In chapter 23, Eaton voices his frustration by shouting questions at the portraits of his parents. How might they have responded to his questions had they lived to see the arrival of Lizzie?

11. What should Dana and Hugh learn from the experience of Ali?s parents? What would the ideal school for Lizzie be like? What does Ali?s story indicate about integration?

12. Recent developments in DNA mapping have made it possible to discover not only lineage (as was the case for the biracial descendents of Thomas Jefferson) but also many general geographic details about one?s ancestry. If you were to undergo such testing, what revelations would please you? What revelations would disappoint you?

13. Discuss Eaton?s ?reunion? with Saundra Belisle. Were their youths marked by any similarities, despite the fact that they lived in distinctly different worlds?

14. What role does location play in **Family Tree**? Would the story have unfolded differently within the aristocracy of the South, or in a West Coast city?

15. What does Corinne?s story reveal about the false selves we sometimes construct? Who are the most authentic people you know? Who in your life would stand by you after a revelation like Corinne?s?

16. Does Eaton?s history demonstrate the ways in which racism has waned in recent generations, or the ways in which very little has changed?

17. Consider whether the issues at the center of **Family Tree** manifest themselves in your life. Is your neighborhood

racially integrated? How many people of color hold executive positions at the top companies in your community? Is there a gulf between the ideal and the reality of a color-blind society in 21st?century America?

Author Bio

Barbara Delinsky is the author of more than 20 *New York Times* bestselling books, including BEFORE AND AGAIN, THE SCENT OF JASMINE and LOVE SONGS. She has been published in 28 languages worldwide. A lifelong New Englander, Delinsky earned a B.A. in psychology at Tufts University and an M.A. in sociology at Boston College. She lives in Massachusetts with her husband, more books than she'll ever be able to read, two tennis racquets, and enough electronic devices to keep in close touch with her children and their families.

Critical Praise

?Loyal readers who have followed Barbara Delinsky?s writing for many years will not be surprised at the depth of characterization in **Family Tree**. Delinsky?s latest is well suited for fans of the serious themed books of Jodi Picoult, Anita Shreve, and Jacquelyn Mitchard. Full of complex and fascinating family dynamics as its characters are forced to come to terms with issues such as faith, race and loyalty, **Family Tree** is thought-provoking and memorable. After 26 years of publishing and 19 *New York Times* bestsellers, Delinsky will be ?discovered? by a new generation of readers.?

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