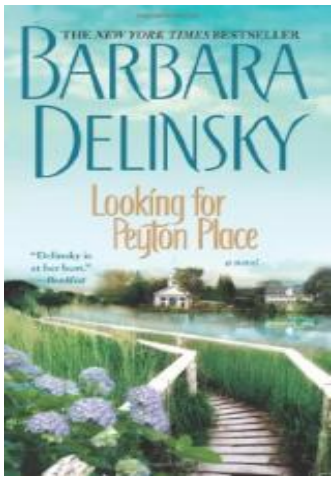
Looking for Peyton Place

by Barbara Delinsky



About the Book

For Annie Barnes, going home to Middle River means dealing with truths long hidden, some of which she buried there herself. But it is a journey she knows she must take if she is to put to rest, once and for all, her misgivings about her mother's recent death.

To an outsider, Middle River is a picture-perfect New Hampshire town. But Annie grew up there, and she knows all its secrets -- as did her idol Grace Metalious, author of the infamous novel Peyton Place, which laid a small town's sexual secrets bare for all the world to see. Though Grace actually lived in a nearby town, the residents of Middle River have always believed she used them as the model for her revolutionary novel, and some even insist Annie's grandmother was the model for one of Grace's most scandalous characters. With these rumors and whispers about Peyton Place haunting her childhood, Annie came to identify so closely with the author that it was Grace and her bold rebellion against 1950s conformity that inspired Annie to get out of Middle River and make a life for herself in Washington, D.C.

It's been a good life, too. Annie Barnes is now a bestselling author, reaching that level with only her third novel. Success has given her a confidence she never had as a young girl in Middle River -- and it has given the residents of that town something new to worry about. When they hear Annie is returning for a lengthy visit, everyone, including Annie's two sisters, believes she's coming home to write about them.

Though amused by the discomfort she causes in Middle River, Annie has no intention of writing a novel about the town or its people. It is her mother's death -- under circumstances that don't quite add up -- that has brought her back, and soon her probing questions start to make people nervous. When she discovers evidence of dangerous pollutants emanating from the local paper mill -- poisons that she comes to believe contributed to her mother's fatal illness -- Annie finds herself at odds with most of the town's inhabitants, including her sisters, both of whom are seemingly unfazed by the incriminating evidence she uncovers. Because the mill is the town's main employer, everyone is afraid of what might happen if Annie digs deeper, and their fears soon start to turn ugly.

For Annie, though, there is no turning back, as passion and rage propel her forward in a determined quest. Coming face-to-face with decades of secrets and lies, she knows she must find the strength to move beyond the legacy of Grace Metalious, defying her past to heal the wounds of the town and her own family.

Discussion Guide

1. Annie Barnes grew up feeling like an outcast. In what ways did this shape her adult life? Do you think it is possible to outgrow self-esteem issues? Discuss Kaitlin DuPuis in this light. Are the self-esteem issues faced by teenagers today the same as they were thirty years ago? How do they differ between boys and girls

2. How would you describe the relationship between Annie Barnes and Grace Metalious? Do you ever have discussions with people who aren't there? Annie claims that she is different from Grace. Discuss their differences. How do these differences affect the choices Annie makes?

3. A major theme in **Looking for Peyton Place** is the discrepancy between perception and reality. Specifically, Middle River offers many instances in which physical beauty is a foil for the ugliness that festers beneath. Can you give examples of this? Does this phenomenon apply to people as well? What other discrepancies between perception and reality did you find in this book?

4. Did James Meade have a moral obligation to come forward sooner with his knowledge of the mill's involvement with mercury poisoning? Was he justified in keeping the secret of the mill for as long as he did?

5. What is the first word that comes to mind when you think of the original **Peyton Place**? Have your thoughts about the town changed since reading **Looking for Peyton Place**?

6. When the original **Peyton Place** was written in the 1950's, the sources of scandal in small towns were murder, suicide, and illegitimate birth. What are the new "dirty little secrets" that Annie discovers in Middle River? What would the "dirty little secrets" be in your town?

7. Annie's personality takes several shifts in the course of **Looking for Peyton Place**. Describe these shifts. Can you explain them? Do you believe that people can be one way with friends and a completely different way with family?

8. Annie claims to love her life in Washington, D.C. What are its positives? Negatives? Compare and contrast the plusses of her Washington life and the plusses of her Middle River life.

9. Looking for Peyton Place was inspired by the original novel by Grace Metalious, and while it isn't necessary to have read that earlier book, familiarity with it offers another layer of discussion. How many **Peyton Place**-isms (e.g., Road's End Inn) can you find in **Looking for Peyton Place**?

10. Like the town of Peyton Place before it, Middle River is a character in and of itself. What are its traits?

11. The theme of going home again after a long time away is one that many of us face in our own lives. Do you think there is an element of defeat when a person returns home? Or is it the reverse?

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.

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