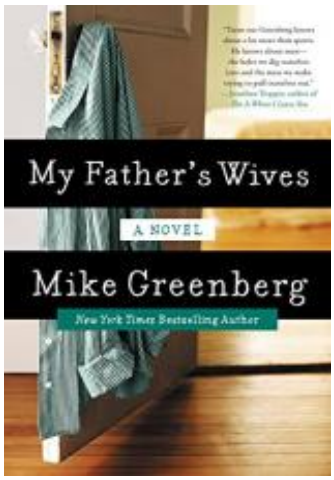
My Father's Wives

by Mike Greenberg



About the Book

Jonathan Sweetwater has been blessed with money, a fulfilling career, great kids and Claire, his smart, gorgeous, sophisticated wife. But there is one thing Jonathan never had: a relationship with his father.

Percival Sweetwater III has been absent from his son?s life since Jonathan was nine years old. A five-term U.S. senator, now dead, Percy was beloved by presidents, his constituents, and women alike, especially the five women who married him after Jonathan?s mother.

Jonathan hasn?t thought about Percy or the hole he left in his life for years. Dedicated to Claire and his family, he?s nothing like his serial monogamist father. But then Jonathan discovers evidence that everything in his marriage may not be as perfect as he thought. Hurt and uncertain what to do, he knows that the only way to move forward is to go back.

On this quest for understanding --- about himself, about manhood, about marriage --- Jonathan decides to track down his father?s five ex-wives. His journey will take him from cosmopolitan cities to the mile-high mountains to a tropical island --- and ultimately back to confront the one thing Jonathan has that his father never did: home.

Discussion Guide

1. In the opening scene of MY FATHER?S WIVES, the author/narrator uses a popular analogy to describe a life-changing experience: ?I?ve been struck by lightning several times?None of them was my wife, by the way. You don?t marry the girl who strikes you like lightning, because that doesn?t last forever and you never know what you might be left with when it wears away.? Are you the type who commits to ?lightning? in relationships? What do you think it adds to the experience? Takes away?

2. The setup of MY FATHER?S WIVES contains a theme often explored in books, movies, music, art: infidelity. On a

surprise visit home from work, the narrator, Jonathan Sweetwater, catches --- or thinks he catches --- his wife in the act. How does this book compare with other works exploring affairs? What does the author, Mike Greenberg, do stylistically and structurally to set it apart?

3. MY FATHER?S WIVES is a book written by a man and is told from the perspective of a male protagonist. How do you think the novel would be different if the author was female? The protagonist, a woman, and the situation, reversed?

4. When thinking about whether to approach his wife about her supposed infidelity, Jonathan remembers something she said to him before they were married about the two types of people in life: ?There are those you lie *to* and those you lie *with*. At the end of the day, that?s the most important distinction you can make.? Do you think that?s true? What does it say about Claire?s character that she thinks that?s the *most* important distinction between people? Do you think it?s more honorable to lie to someone or with them, or are both equally bad?

5. Let?s say your partner is having an affair. Would you rather find out like Jonathan did or be blissfully unaware? Or do you think ?open? relationships, where both partners are free to see other people but remain first and foremost committed to each other, are acceptable and doable?

6. If you found out a friend?s partner was having an affair and you knew it would be a devastating revelation, would you tell your friend? Confront the cheating husband/wife first? Remain silent?

7. MY FATHER?S WIVES is told over the course of a week and a half, broken down by each day of the week. Do you think this type of structure fits the context of the story? How do you think the novel might be different if it had stretched over a series of months? Years?

8. After catching his wife with another man, Jonathan makes a split decision not to say anything to her about what he thought he witnessed. Instead, he hires a private investigator. Why do you think he made that choice instead of addressing the issue honestly up front? If you were in his shoes, what would you have done?

9. MY FATHER?S WIVES is a book about trust and what happens when people we love are unfaithful. It?s also about a boy coming to terms with his father?s legacy in hopes of better understanding himself. How do you think the two threads are related? Does the author do a good job interlinking the disparate storylines?

10. One of Percy Sweetwater?s famous sayings as a Senator was that people are the sum total of the decisions they make. If that were the case, what type of person would that make Jonathan? Claire? Percy? Do you think you?re the sum total of the decisions you have made in your life? How does that affect your decision making day-to-day?

11. Jonathan?s mother tells him that ?the key to life is learning to put up with the imperfections. If you expect your life to be perfect, you will always be disappointed. If you expect *yourself* to be perfect, you will never be satisfied. And if you expect *others* to be perfect, you will always be alone.? But doesn?t society tell us we should strive to be perfect? Post perfect family photos on Facebook? Get perfect grades? Meet the perfect partner and have the perfect wedding? Be the envy of others? What do you make of this dichotomy? Do you think putting up with imperfections means Jonathan should put up with his wife?s infidelity?

12. Jonathan?s character is the most clearly developed in the novel because the plot revolves around his thoughts,

emotions and journey. What about the other characters? Were you able to get a full sense of who they were and their relationship with Jonathan, or did they seem like stock characters? Why or why not?

13. From the beginning, Greenberg leads the reader to believe that Claire is, in fact, having an affair. But towards the end of the novel, he introduces evidence to suggest that it may have been her close friend and look-alike, Betsy, instead. Do you think the twist in the narrative was effective? Who do you think was having the affair, Claire or Betsy, and what proof do you have to support your claim?

14. Most of the characters in MY FATHER?S WIVES are extremely wealthy. What role does money play in the narrative, and did its presence (and abundance) make you more or less interested in the story? How might the book be different if the characters were regular, working class people?

15. At the end of the novel, Jonathan decides not to find out what the private investigator has uncovered. Do you think this is consistent with a choice his character would?ve made? Does it serve as a fitting ending to the book? Why or why not?

16. In addition to writing novels, author Mike Greenberg is the co-host of ESPN?s ?Mike and Mike,? the highest-rated sports talk program in the United States. Did that influence your decision to read the book? How do you think his ?day job? influences his writing?

Author Bio

Mike Greenberg is the cohost of ESPN's ?Mike and Mike,? the highest-rated sports talk program in the United States, and the author of the *New York Times* bestselling books ALL YOU COULD ASK FOR, WHY MY WIFE THINKS I?M AN IDIOT and MIKE AND MIKE?S RULES FOR SPORTS AND LIFE. He is a graduate of the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University and a native of New York City. He currently lives in Connecticut with his wife and two children.

Critical Praise

?In Jonathan Sweetwater, Mike Greenberg has created a character worth rooting for --- a smart, strong, sensitive man whose devotion to his wife and children is palpable. Faced with the possibility that his marriage is not what he thinks it is, Jonathan embarks on a moving journey fueled by questions that are every bit as meaningful as their answers. MY FATHER?S WIVES is a remarkably compelling story --- thought-provoking, sincere and, at its heart, undeniably romantic.?

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