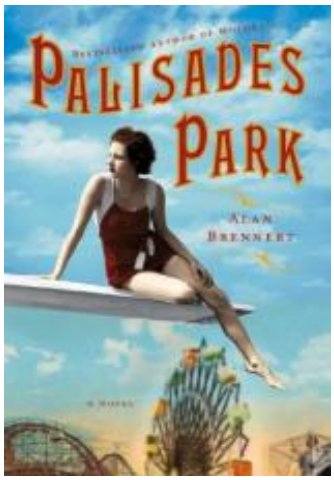
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

Palisades Park

by Alan Brennert



About the Book

Bestseller Alan Brennert's spellbinding story about a family of dreamers and their lives within the legendary Palisades Amusement Park

Growing up in the 1930s, there is no more magical place than Palisades Amusement Park in New Jersey --- especially for seven-year-old Antoinette, who horrifies her mother by insisting on the unladylike nickname Toni, and her brother, Jack. Toni helps her parents, Eddie and Adele Stopka, at the stand where they sell homemade French fries amid the roar of the Cyclone roller coaster. There is also the lure of the world?s biggest salt-water pool, complete with divers whose astonishing stunts inspire Toni, despite her mother's insistence that girls can't be high divers.

But a family of dreamers doesn't always share the same dreams, and then the world intrudes: There's the Great Depression, and Pearl Harbor, which hits home in ways that will split the family apart; and perils like fire and race riots in the park. Both Eddie and Jack face the dangers of war, while Adele has ambitions of her own --- and Toni is determined to take on a very different kind of danger in impossible feats as a high diver. Yet they are all drawn back to each other --- and to Palisades Park --- until the park closes forever in 1971.

Evocative and moving, with the trademark brilliance at transforming historical events into irresistible fiction that made Alan Brennert?s MOLOKA'I and HONOLULU into reading group favorites, PALISADES PARK takes us back to a time when life seemed simpler --- except, of course, it wasn't.

Discussion Guide

Discussion Questions

1. Was there a place like Palisades Park where you grew up? What did it mean to you?

2. Was Eddie justified in running away from home? Was he justified in refusing all contact with his mother and stepfather? What would you have done?

3. How was the Palisades ?family? of workers and concessionaires like a real family, and how was it different?

4. Have you ever had a dream or ambition in life that you never pursued (or did)?

5. Are you a parent? Would you have encouraged or discouraged your daughter from pursuing the dangerous life of a high diver?

6. Can you imagine being a daredevil like Toni? Could you have defied social conventions of the time to live the life she led?

7. Do you think Eddie was right or wrong in enlisting in the Navy? Can you understand Adele?s angry response to it?

8. What was your reaction to Adele?s abandonment of her family?

9. Why did the author include the (true life) role the Mafia played in the history of the park (especially as regards the later civil rights protests)?

10. How does Toni?s stand against the park?s policy about African-Americans fit in with other incidents in her life?

11. Jack?s postwar illness was once called ?shell shock? and would today be diagnosed as post-traumatic stress disorder. How has the treatment of this veteran?s disability changed (or not) since the Korean War?

12. Compare and contrast the dreams and desires of each member of the Stopka family and how they changed over the course of the story.

13. Would the lives of Eddie, Adele, Toni and Jack have been different if not influenced by Palisades Park? How?

Author Bio

Alan Brennert is the author of HONOLULU and MOLOKA?I, which was a 2006-2007 BookSense Reading Group Pick and won the 2006 Bookies Award, sponsored by the Contra Costa Library, for the Book Club Book of the Year. In addition to novels, he has written short stories, teleplays, screenplays, and the libretto of a stage musical, Weird Romance. He won an Emmy Award and a People?s Choice Award for his work as a writer-producer on the television series "L.A. Law," and he has been nominated for a Golden Globe Award and for the Writers Guild of America Award for Outstanding Teleplay of the Year. His story ?MaQui? won a Nebula Award. He lives in Sherman Oaks, California, but his heart is in Hawaii.

Palisades Park

by Alan Brennert

Publication Date: April 9, 2013
Genres: Fiction, Historical Fiction, Women's Fiction
Hardcover: 432 pages
Publisher: St. Martin's Press
ISBN-10: 0312643721
ISBN-13: 9780312643720