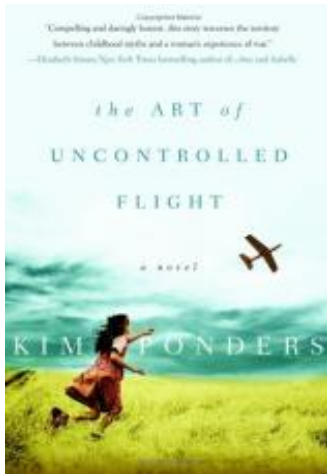


The Art of Uncontrolled Flight

by Kim Ponders



About the Book

Even as a little girl, Annie Shaw wanted to fly. Her father, a Korean War fighter pilot, was a mysterious and elusive figure, who captivated her at an early age with his easy charm and adventurous spirit. When tragedy strikes her family, Annie vows to take control of her life and become an aviator in her own right. But her pride in having earned her wings as an Air Force pilot is quickly sobered by the emergence of war. Iraq invades Kuwait, and Annie finds herself deployed to Saudi Arabia, waiting for the Gulf War to begin.

A tough, independent woman, Annie holds her own inside the elite, male-dominated fraternity of flying, but a thrilling, ill-fated romance threatens to bring her personal and professional lives to a collision point. And when a critical error places her crew at risk, Annie learns that flying in wartime carries a shadow far greater than the mystique it held for her when she was a child.

Written by one of the first American female aviators ever to fly in a war zone, **The Art of Uncontrolled Flight** is an extraordinary story of a woman's perseverance in the tough and unsentimental world of military flight. In this compelling work, part romance, memoir, and war story, Ponders masterfully illuminates both the great joy and the terrible tragedy that result from love and from war.

Discussion Guide

1. The novel both begins and ends with Annie sitting alone, waiting for the arrival of a man (her father in the first chapter and Dexter in the final one). How has Annie changed? How are the men in her life different?
2. Annie has a romantic view of war in the first chapter. Has her perspective changed at the end of the story (see both chapters nine and five)? How?

3. The author switches between first and third point-of-view and between present and past tense. Chapter five is even more fragmented and extends beyond the timeframe of the rest of the novel. Why does the author use this structure? What does it achieve? Does it enhance the novel's themes (war, survival, etc.), or does it distance the reader from the story?

4. How does Annie's guilt about her mother's death feed her character later on? Does it affect the way she makes decisions and interacts with others?

5. In some societies, fire is used as part of a cleansing ritual after battle. What role does fire play in this novel?

6. In chapter eight, Annie's father tells her (p. 165): "You needed a hero." Was he right?

7. "Uncontrolled Flight" is a technical flying term meaning, as you might imagine, a flight profile (stall, dive, etc.) that the pilot cannot sustain, often preceding a crash. How does "uncontrolled flight" serve as a metaphor in the story?

Author Bio

Kim Ponders lives in New Hampshire with her husband and two children. A graduate of Syracuse University and the Warren Wilson MFA for Writers program, she still serves as a member of the United States Air Force Reserves. This is her first novel.

Critical Praise

"Compelling ... Readers will find insight and wisdom."

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