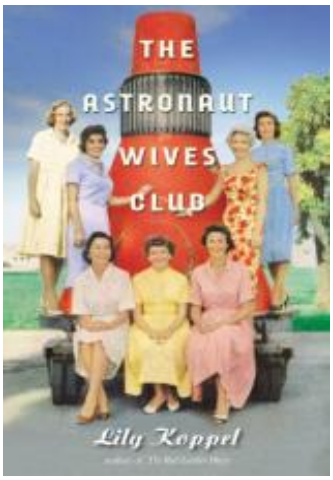
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The Astronaut Wives Club

by Lily Koppel



About the Book

As America's Mercury Seven astronauts were launched on death-defying missions, television cameras focused on the brave smiles of their young wives. Overnight, these women were transformed from military spouses into American royalty. They had tea with Jackie Kennedy, appeared on the cover of *Life* magazine, and quickly grew into fashion icons.

Annie Glenn, with her picture-perfect marriage, was the envy of the other wives; platinum-blonde Rene Carpenter was proclaimed JFK's favorite; and licensed pilot Trudy Cooper arrived on base with a secret. Together with the other wives they formed the Astronaut Wives Club, meeting regularly to provide support and friendship. Many became next-door neighbors and helped to raise each other's children by day, while going to glam parties at night as the country raced to land a man on the Moon.

As their celebrity rose-and as divorce and tragic death began to touch their lives-they continued to rally together, and the wives have now been friends for more than 50 years. THE ASTRONAUT WIVES CLUB tells the real story of the women who stood beside some of the biggest heroes in American history.

Discussion Guide

1. Who is your favorite character? What made you relate to that particular wife?

2. Would you let your significant other be blasted into space? What do you think allowed these women to let their husbands go on these incredible, but also very risky, journeys?

3. Does the sudden celebrity around the astronauts and their families depicted in this book remind you of today?s celebrity culture in any way? How does it strike you as different? In what ways are the astronaut wives similar to today?s reality show families? In what ways are they different?

4. The Astronaut Wives Club depicts the female friendship and female bonding that result from an unusual circumstance. Do the friendships and bonds in this book remind you of friendships you?ve experienced? What tensions did you see between the different groups of wives? Did you expect more solidarity? Less? Were you surprised at how the friendships evolved over time, so that the wives now meet for reunions and are able to be more open with one another than they ever were back then?

5. In many ways, The Astronaut Wives Club is about what it meant to be a ?good? wife in the 1950s and 1960s, and how that role changed over the course of the space program. What do you think it means to be a good wife? A good husband? How do you think those roles have changed since the time of this book?

6. The wives in The Astronaut Wives Club were often under a high level of stress and intense scrutiny, without the benefit of preparation for or training in dealing with the media. Do you think NASA should have prepared them better to deal with the pressures of public attention?

7. The early astronauts and their families had deals with Life magazine to let photographers and reporters into their homes. In many instances, the lives they were sharing with the media seem idealized. How do you think those idealized stories affected their lived day-to-day experiences? How might they have affected the day-to-day lives of housewives who read the pieces?

8. Were you surprised at what happened to the widows of the Apollo 1 fire like Pat White? Do you think being in the space program was harder on the astronauts or their wives?

9. As a contemporary reader, were you surprised to read about the extramarital affairs between a few of the astronauts and the Cape Cookies at Cape Canaveral, Florida? What did you think of the two worlds: the playground of the Cape and the wives? suburban world back home in Houston? Putting yourself in their shoes, do you think you would have challenged the status quo?

10. One of the wives, Rene Carpenter, always seemed to challenge the existing state of affairs of being the perfect archetypal astronaut wife and went on to write an opinionated women?s column and host her own feminist television talk show. How do you think she was able to do this?

11. Were you surprised by any of the wives? reactions to their husbands? decisions to go to space? How about the wives? decisions post?space program? What did you think about how going to the Moon changed the men and the marriages (often expanding the men?s horizons and leading to divorce)?

12. Do you think Betty Grissom had good grounds for her lack of confidence in NASA, going so far as to sue?

13. The wives themselves set up the Astronaut Wives Club, but in many ways the official, all-inclusive organization failed to become the space for open sharing that the founders intended it to be. How did the on-record Astronaut Wives Club differ from the smaller friend groups that formed among the wives? What purpose do you think the official club

ended up serving, and why do you think it might not have become what the founders had hoped? Do you think it finally comes together with the reunion group of wives that meets today?

14. The astronaut wives? world was an era of women sharing intimacies on a daily basis over coffee, cocktails, and cigarettes. What have we gained today that the wives didn?t have, and what have we lost?

Author Bio

Lily Koppel is the bestselling author of THE RED LEATHER DIARY. She has written for the *New York Times*, the *New York Times Magazine*, the *Daily Beast*, the *Huffington Post* and *Glamour*. She lives in New York City with her husband and their two spacey rescue dogs, Ozzy and Lucky.

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Publication Date: June 11, 2013
Genres: History, Nonfiction
Hardcover: 288 pages
Publisher: Grand Central Publishing
ISBN-10: 1455503258
ISBN-13: 9781455503254