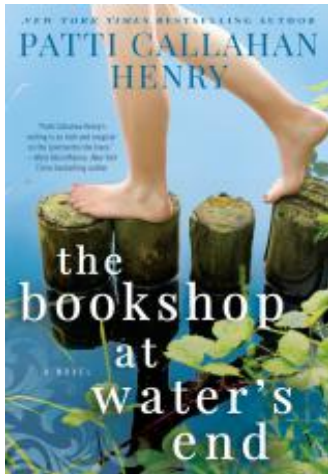


# The Bookshop at Water's End

by Patti Callahan Henry

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## About the Book

**The women who spent their childhood summers in a small southern town discover it harbors secrets as lush as the marshes that surround it.**

Bonny Blankenship's most treasured memories are of idyllic summers spent in Watersend, South Carolina, with her best friend, Lainey McKay. Amid the sand dunes and oak trees draped with Spanish moss, they swam and wished for happy-ever-afters, then escaped to the local bookshop to read and whisper in the glorious cool silence. Until the night that changed everything, the night that Lainey's mother disappeared.

Now, in her early 50s, Bonny is desperate to clear her head after a tragic mistake threatens her career as an emergency room doctor, and her marriage crumbles around her. With her troubled teenage daughter, Piper, in tow, she goes back to the beloved river house, where she is soon joined by Lainey and her two young children. During lazy summer days and magical nights, they reunite with bookshop owner Mimi, who is tangled with the past and its mysteries. As the three women cling to a fragile peace, buried secrets and long-ago loves return like the tide.

## Discussion Guide

1. The river is a prominent presence in *THE BOOKSHOP AT WATER'S END*. What does it mean to you and what does it represent? To the characters?
2. Bonny has wanted to be a doctor all her life. Is there a job or purpose you've been called to in your life? A profession you wish you'd started? (And if so, why not now?) Are we "called" to certain vocations? Is there anything you were "meant to do"?
3. When Bonny's career is on the line, her identity collapses and she must find a new way to move through life. Is this a

hazard of identifying so strongly with one's career? Has this happened to you or someone you love?

4. Lainey is an artist and she expresses herself in the world this way. Does art help us express our internal world or is it just another career? Does Lainey's art help her find her way to a better way of living with her husband and children? To reconciling the loss of her mother?

5. Both Lainey and Owen have lived without their mother since childhood, not knowing if she is dead or alive. Lainey has been obsessed with finding her, sometimes to the detriment of her husband and children. Would you continue to look for her or accept this loss? How far do we go to find those we love or bring them back into the fold of the family? How did living without a mother affect Lainey and her relationships and choices? How did living without a mother affect Owen and his relationships and choices?

6. Female relationships populate this novel --- mother/daughter; best friends; mentor/teen. How do these relationships shape and change each character? Do you have a Bonny or a Mimi in your life? How has that affected you?

7. Bonny has been in love with Owen for as long as she can remember. Is this "real" love or a pining for the past? Can she ever have a lasting relationship with him?

8. Lainey and Bonny have been best friends since they were eleven years old and yet Bonny kept her deepest thoughts about Owen to herself. Is this a betrayal of their friendship? Should she have told Lainey how she really felt all along? Have you had a friendship so long-lasting and grounded in childhood?

9. When Piper loses George, each character blames herself in a different way: Piper for looking away; Lainey for being obsessed with finding her mother; and Bonny for distracting everyone when Owen appeared. When you read that scene, did you blame anyone? Did you find yourself blaming one of the women more than another? Why?

10. Mimi the bookseller visits this novel from *The Idea of Love*. She has affected these women's lives for generations with her bookstore and with her book suggestions. Do books and bookstores have the capability to change us and/or our lives? Is there a book that has changed you? Your life? A bookstore that feels like "home" to you?

11. Home. All of these characters are trying to identify and find "home." Is this a place? A house? A group of people? A feeling? A town?

12. One of the very last lines is about Lainey's mother --- "We all do the very best we can." Do you think she did the best she could? Is this true in your life or with those you love?

13. Mimi believes that the river brings "what it will," and as the novel ends, she waits for what it will bring next. Is nature an omen? Does it hint at what comes next?

## Author Bio

Patti Callahan Henry is the *New York Times* and *USA TODAY* bestselling author of several novels, including

SURVIVING SAVANNAH and BECOMING MRS. LEWIS. She is the recipient of the Christy Award, the Harper Lee Award for Alabama's Distinguished Writer of the Year Award, and the Alabama Library Association Book of the Year. She is the cohost and cocreator of the popular weekly online live web show and podcast "Friends and Fiction." A full-time author and mother of three, she lives in Alabama and South Carolina with her family.

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## **The Bookshop at Water's End**

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