

The First Day of the Rest of My Life

by Cathy Lamb



About the Book

In this deeply moving and wonderfully insightful novel, acclaimed author Cathy Lamb explores what can happen when one woman decides to reclaim her past --- and her future --- no matter where they lead?

Madeline O'Shea tells people what to do with their lives. A renowned life coach, she inspires thousands of women through her thriving practice --- exuding enviable confidence along with her stylish suits and sleek hair. But her confidence, just like her fashionable demeanor, is all a front.

For decades, Madeline has lived in fear of her traumatic past becoming public. Now a reporter is reinvestigating the notorious crime that put Madeline's mother behind bars, threatening to destroy her elaborate façade. Only Madeline's sister, Annie, and their frail grandparents know about her childhood --- but lately Madeline has reason to wonder if her grandparents also have a history they've been keeping from her.

As the demons of the past swirl around her, a childhood friend with a gentle heart is urging Madeline to have faith in him --- and in herself. And as she allows her resistance to thaw, the pain she expects pales in comparison to the surprises headed straight to her door. With one bold, unprecedented move, Madeline O'Shea may just wake up out of the sadness and guilt that have kept her sleepwalking through life for so long --- and discover that the worst thing that can happen is sometimes the very thing we desperately need.

The First Day of the Rest of My Life is an eloquent and triumphant tale of a fierce act of love, a family's legacy, and one woman's awakening to her own power --- with no secrets....

Discussion Guide

1. Was Madeline an effective life coach? If you made an appointment for a life-coaching session, what do you think she

would tell you to change? Improve? Or would she say that you have gathered your hellfire and are on the right course?

2. Aisha Heinbrenner, a client of Madeline's, says, "You know, Madeline? I'm not lonely at all. It's bothered me that I'm not lonely, because I thought that I should be. But I'm not. Alone means I'm with myself. Alone means I answer to myself, I do what I want for, literally, the first time in my life. Alone means that I can think what I want. It means I'm not burdened with the constancy of doing things for others." Can you relate to this statement?

3. If you were on the jury at Marie Elise's trial, would you have found her guilty or not guilty for killing Sherwinn, Gavin, and Pauly? Did Marie Elise make the right choice? What would you have done?

4. For many readers, the scenes in the shack and in the courtroom where Madeline and Annie recount the abuse they suffered may be very difficult to read. However, if those scenes had been softened, the reality of what happened, and the impact on Madeline and Annie, would also have been softened. Did the author strike the right balance?

5. Madeline said, Annie relates better to animals than people, and she cannot abide abuse of any kind. She decided to be a veterinarian during her mystery years. Annie said, I saw too many human limbs in places where they shouldn't be, and I decided I wanted to be a part of putting things back together, not destroying them. But I don't want to work with people. I love animals. They don't frighten me, they don't need anything from me but medical care, and they won't hurt or betray me intentionally. How do you picture Annie? If she lived next door to you, would you be friends? What do you see happening in her future?

6. In many ways, this was the story about a scratched and battered violin and the lives of the people who owned it over three generations. How did the author intertwine history, both during the Nazi occupation of France and back and forth to Madeline's childhood, to propel the story?

7. What did the lavender field symbolize? What did the swans and the Land of the Swans symbolize? The marbles? The emotional weather? Pink? The ice cream and pizza?

8. Was there a particular scene that best exemplified Emmanuelle and Anton's love for each other? Which one?

9. How did Madeline and Annie change from the beginning of the book to the end? Would they have changed if they hadn't been forced to change because of the article and the blackmail? What would they have lost if Madeline hadn't made her speech at the Rock Your Womanhood conference?

10. Madeline says, "I can only compare life to being shot from a cannon into the middle of space and being bombarded by all sorts of debris? pieces of satellites and shuttles, asteroids, shooting stars, maybe an alien spaceship. We're hit all the time and sometimes we can't find Earth. We can't even find the Milky Way galaxy. We're lost. Running around, dodging this and that, trying not to get hurt or killed, and all the while we're looking for home. That's how life is. It's a meteor shower." Is this true? What does it tell you about her?

Author Bio

CATHY LAMB lives in Oregon. She is married with three children. She writes late at night when it's just her and the moon and a few shooting stars. Visit her at cathylamb.net.

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