The Path Beneath Her Feet

by Janis Robinson Daly



About the Book

THE PATH BENEATH HER FEET continues the story of Dr. Eliza Edwards? commitment to limit suffering and save lives amid the tumultuous landscapes of 1930s and 1940s America.

In 1936, as the Depression ravages careers, Eliza redefines her abilities. When a position calls her to Warm Springs, Georgia, to tend to a polio patient, Eliza faces the harsh realities of a society plagued by prejudice. Mirroring the packhorse librarians? mission to bring books to the illiterate communities of Appalachia, the American Women's Hospitals delivers essential medical care. Eliza joins the AWH, reclaiming her purpose and rediscovering her ambitions against the backdrop of the Tennessee mountains. As family responsibilities call her home to Boston, the heartbreak of losing those dearest to her amplifies with the eruption of World War II, bringing chaos to the world and sending her sons into battle.

In this emotionally charged sequel to THE UNLOCKED PATH, Dr. Eliza Edwards marks her journey through sacrifice, love and an unyielding pursuit of justice in an era marked by adversity. The ingénue student becomes the mature mentor, steadfast in her calling to effect social change by addressing women?s health issues and guiding others to realize their dreams.

Discussion Guide

A book club kit, which includes recipes for dishes mentioned in the book, can be found here on Janis Robinson Daly?s website. Janis is also available to join book clubs for an author chat, in-person or over Zoom. Contact her through her website.

1. Eliza is a more mature protagonist, age 57, when the story opens in 1936 and age 68 by the epilogue in 1947. Can you think of other books that have a mature protagonist? What were the similarities and differences between Eliza and those

other characters?

2. Eliza finds her strength from the women in her life: Aunt Florence, Charlotte, Olga, Bess, Kay, Grace and Helen. Do you have a favorite among the other characters? Were you surprised by their paths? Which one? Why?

3. How familiar were you with FDR?s rehabilitation center for polio patients in Warm Springs? Did you learn anything about the center or the patients? Do you know anyone who contracted polio before the development of the vaccine? How were their lives affected?

4. Racism was a theme in this book, from Kay Clark?s treatment in Warm Springs to Toshiko?s experience at graduation. Why is it still important to bring these instances from history to light today?

5. Two popular books in recent years introduced readers to the packhorse librarians of Kentucky. Have you read either? (THE BOOK WOMAN OF TROUBLESOME CREEK and THE GIVER OF STARS). Like those books, THE PATH BENEATH HER FEET introduces readers to the work of the American Women?s Hospitals in Appalachia. Were you aware of those medical outposts before reading? How do these centers compare to the access to healthcare today?

6. Eliza grew up in Philadelphia and moved to Boston when she married, and she remained there until the opportunity arose to travel to the rural spots of Warm Springs, GA and then Jellico, TN. Have you ever made a drastic move for your career or a relationship?

7. Olga advises Eliza: ?The few times I left you on your own, you fell in love with the wrong man? A third time isn?t always a charm.? Were you surprised by the letter from Patrick? Was it the correct ending to their love story? Was Chet, a mountain man with little education, ?wrong? for Eliza? Do opposites attract?

8. All forms of dementia destroy not only the one with the disease but also affect their caregivers. Eliza must choose to leave behind the Maternity Shelter she built to care for Aunt Florence. How have caregiver roles changed in the past 90+ years? Do you think the healthcare industry has made enough progress with the cure and treatment of dementia or caregiving?

9. Opinions on Eliza?s actions to deliver Shirley Cole?s baby during the chaos at the hospital on the night of the Cocoanut Grove nightclub fire. Was she negligent? What would you have done? Were you surprised that Eliza reached out to her ex-husband?s widow, Helen Shaw, to be her lawyer?

10. Letters throughout the book depict the primary means of communication in the first half of the 1900s. When was the last time you wrote a letter? To whom? When was the last letter you received? From whom? (Not a card or a thank-you note, a handwritten letter covering at least one page). What have we lost with the demise of letter-writing?

11. The author dedicated THE PATH BENEATH HER FEET to her parents, members of The Greatest Generation, ?who came of age during the Great Depression and served upon the seas and at the home front during World War II. Their history is ours. Let us not forget it. Let us learn from it.? What can we learn from the people who lived during the tumultuous landscapes of 1930s and 1940s America?

Janis loves hearing from book clubs. Submit highlights from your group?s discussion through the contact form on her

website to receive a free gift.

Author Bio

Splitting her time between Cape Cod, New Hampshire, and Florida, a tablet becomes Janis Robinson Daly?s library and desk, packed for reading and writing, wherever she might land.

Inspired by the discovery that an ancestor founded the Woman?s Medical College of PA in 1850, Daly wrote her first novel, THE UNLOCKED PATH, which celebrates pioneering women doctors at the turn of the 20th century.

Its sequel, THE PATH BENEATH HER FEET, honors the work of the American Women?s Hospitals in rural America during the 1930s. THE UNLOCKED PATH was named a #1 New Release for US History on Amazon in August 2022, received an Honorable Mention for General Fiction from the 2023 New England Book Festival Awards, and was named a finalist for the 2023 Goethe Awards of Late Historical Fiction from the Chanticleer International Book Awards.

Daly graduated with a B.A. in Psychology from Wheaton College, at the time, a women?s college. At Wheaton, she developed a fond appreciation of the supportive relationships established between students and a heightened awareness of female-centric issues. A presentation of how her genealogy research inspired her to begin writing has made Daly a sought-after speaker for book clubs, women?s groups, libraries and writers? groups. She has presented at the Historical Novel Society's annual conference, as well as local chapters of AAUW and Soroptimist International, and virtually with the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the American Medical Women's Association.

Her annual #31titleswomeninhistory curated list has gained recognition from historical fiction authors and avid readers as an innovative way to celebrate Women's History Month in March. Contact Janis to recommend a title for consideration or to book her presentation for your library or local reading group.

Critical Praise

?THE PATH BENEATH HER FEET offers a fascinating look at medicine in Depression and WWII-era America. Women doctors in particular --- still a tiny minority in the profession --- faced significant challenges even as the need for care increased. These challenges and the dauntless women who overcame them form the foundation of this sweeping yet intimate novel. Rich in historical details, this story transports the reader back in time while remaining highly relevant to today?s world.?

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Publication Date: September 4, 2024
Genres: Fiction, Historical Fiction, Women's Fiction
Paperback: 357 pages
Publisher: Black Rose Writing
ISBN-10: 1685134726
ISBN-13: 9781685134723