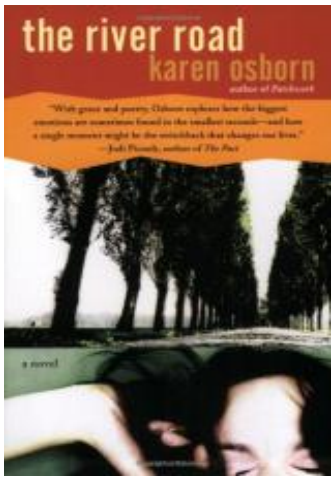
The River Road: A Novel

by Karen Osborn



About the Book

The River Road is the story of the aftermath of a young man's tragic jump off the French King Bridge into the Connecticut River. David and Michael Sanderson are brothers who have been inseparable since childhood from each other and their neighbor's daughter, Kay. As David and Kay get older they begin a passionate and obsessive love affair. While the two of them are home from college on a break, they go out with Michael and wander the Connecticut River Valley at night, experimenting with drugs. At the nearby bridge over the dangerous river, David -- full of hubris and hallucinogens -- jumps, believing he can swim to the side of the cold, swollen river. With this one act, he sets in motion an inexorable chain of events that indelibly alters the lives of everyone involved -- the brother who watched from the car, the girlfriend who stood next to him and helped him climb onto the rail, and both sets of parents.

Told through the alternating voices of Kay, Michael, and David's father, Kevin, **The River Road** is a suspenseful narrative of the accusations, the investigation, and the trial that follows. It is also the tangled story of love and jealousy, of guilt and redemption. In the end, **The River Road** tells of the ways of survival and the endurance of love.

Discussion Guide

1. The author uses different narrators to piece the story together. How does this technique affect the reading of the story? How would the story be different if Jen was a narrator? What if Ellen was a narrator?

2. Kay narrates the prologue, telling her version of what happened that night on the bridge. Does this add to our sympathy for her? Does this become the "true" version of the events that transpired?

3. David is idealized by almost everyone in the story in different ways. How do the characters see him? Do we ever get a clear view of him?

4. Michael says, "Both of us wanted her from the beginning." Is Kay aware of Michael's desire? Is this sibling rivalry limited to their relationship with Kay? There are many stories of destructive sibling rivalry, beginning with Cain and Abel. Discuss the types of conflict inherent in sibling relationships.

5. At certain points in the story, Michael explodes with rage. At one point Michael asks, "How could you want someone that much and hate them all at once?" Is this the reason he lied to his father and then at the trial? Are there other reasons?

6. As his sons enter adolescence, Kevin begins to view Kay as a threat. Jen doesn't see it that way. How and why do their reactions differ? Why is Ellen also seen as a threat?

7. Kevin says, "My lie supported a greater morality." How does Kevin's idea of what is moral differ from Jen's? Is Kevin's lie understandable?

8. How have the events surrounding David's death affected Kevin and Jen's relationship? What causes a family to break apart rather than draw together after a tragedy like this?

9. Michael and Kay come together years later and Michael tells her what really happened on the bridge. What is her reaction? How would this knowledge have helped Kay?

10. All of the narrators feel terrible guilt for what happened to David. How does each of them deal with it? Do they ever find peace?

Author Bio

Award-winning poet Karen Osborn grew up on Grand Island, Connecticut where she lived in a rural area along the banks of the Niagara River. Places filled with the power of nature and the wilderness have always been important to her. She graduated from Hollins College, an all-women's college in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia and went to graduate school in the Ozarks of Arkansas. Since then she has lived in both the Southeast and in New England and has taught literature and creative writing at several colleges and universities. Both a poet and novelist, she is the author of two previous novels, **Patchwork**, *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year, and**Between Earth and Sky**. She lives in Amherst Massachusetts, with her husband and two daughters.

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