The Secrets We Carried: A Butternut Lake Novel

by Mary McNear

About the Book

Quinn LaPointe grew up on beautiful Butternut Lake, safe, secure, sure of her future. But after a high school tragedy, she left for college and never looked back. Becoming a successful writer in Chicago, she worked to keep out the dark memories of an accident that upended her life. But now, after 10 years, she?s finally returned home.

Butternut is the same, and yet everything is changed. Gabriel Shipp, once her very best friend, doesn?t want anything to do with her. The charming guy she remembers is now brooding and withdrawn. Tanner Lightman, the seductive brother of her late boyfriend, wants her to stick around. Annika Bergstrom, an old classmate who once hated Quinn, is now friendly. Everyone, it seems, has a secret.

Determined to come to terms with the tragedy and rebuild old relationships, Quinn settles into Loon Bay Cabins, a rustic but cozy lakeside resort, where she begins writing down her memories of the year before the accident. Her journey though the past leads her to some surprising discoveries about the present. As secrets are revealed and a new love emerges, Quinn finds that understanding the past is the key to the future.

Discussion Guide

1. In chapter 6, Quinn makes a distinction between feeling guilty about the accident and feeling responsible for it. Do you agree with this distinction? And is it possible to be both responsible for *and* guilty about something you have or have not done?

2. In the beginning and at the end of the book, Quinn contemplates the meaning of *home.* In the beginning of the book she describes Butternut as her home, the place she was born and grew up. Her dad says that home is the place where love is. Does she find a ?home? at the end of the novel? What does *home* mean to you?

3. Quinn has three dreams in the novel. They all take place on Shell Lake. The first two are primarily about Quinn?s guilt. But the last dream, the one where Gabriel pulls the ring out of the lake, is different. Why? What do you think it means?

4. Do you think that the burden of guilt Gabriel carries with him is greater than his actions warranted? Quinn thinks that guilt is often proportional to one?s own moral compass. Is this the case with Gabriel? If so, what does it tell you about Gabriel?

5. Quinn returns to Butternut andthe scene of the accident in orderto ?confront? her past. She believesthat if she does this she won?t haveanother breakdown. What do youthink caused her first breakdownin college?

6. The book depicts two mothers who have lost children: Maggie Lightman and Theresa Dobbs. They?ve both handled tragedy very differently. Of course, there are as many different ways to handle tragedy as there are different kinds of people. Do you empathize with both women? How have you handled tragedies in your life?

7. Tanner sends a three-word text to Jake that he can never get out of his head or take back. Have you ever sent a simple, maybe even an innocuous, text to someone that you have regretted?

8. Why do you think Jake drove his truck out on Shell Lake that night? Do you think there was one reason, or several?

9. Do you think Annika bears any responsibility for the accident? Why? Or why not?

10. Why do you think Annika and Jake kept their relationship a secret? Annika didn?t want her crazy father to know. But why didn?t Jake tell his parents and his friends?

11. After Annika?s revelation, Quinn wonders if it is possible to romantically love two people at the same time. What do you think? And is it possible to really love someone you are cheating on?

12. Quinn?s mother died before Quinn can even remember her. How do you think her mother?s absence affected Quinn?s development and character?

Author Bio

Mary McNear, *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author of the *Butternut Lake* series, writes in a local doughnut shop, where she sips Diet Pepsi, observes the hubbub of neighborhood life, and tries to resist the constant temptation of freshly made doughnuts. Mary bases her novels on a lifetime of summers spent in a small town on a lake in the northern Midwest.

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