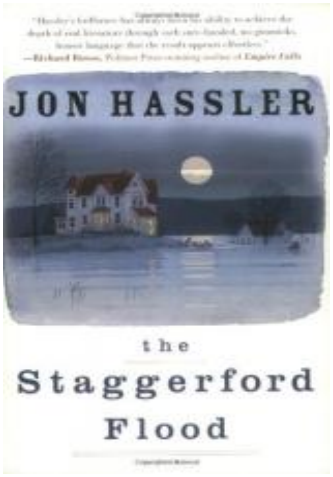
The Staggerford Flood

by Jon Hassler



About the Book

In her eightieth year, Agatha McGee is feeling her age, more tired and less a part of daily life in town. When an article in the local paper tells the whole town about her failing health, Agatha decides she's spent enough time in the house. During her attempts to return to society, a flood hits the Badbattle River, engulfing every house except hers. Staggerford needs Agatha like never before, and seven neighbors, friends, and former students seek refuge with Agatha for four days and nights.

Discussion Guide

1. The newspaper article about Agatha's failing health gets her out of the house and back in the public eye. How do people react to her? How does she, in turn, react to them? What is she trying to prove?

2. On page 45, Fredrick notes that "certain people made Agatha's eyes light up", but that he and Lillian were not those people. How does Agatha's treatment of Frederick and Lillian?the people that care for her day after day?compare with her treatment of those she seldom sees at all? How do you account for the discrepancy? How does Agatha?

3. Discuss Agatha and Lillian's relationship. Do they love or hate each other? What do you think has kept them together for so many years?

4. Agatha often remarks that Lillian and Frederick are "slow-minded". Are they as slow as she seems to think? Discuss specific examples.

5. What is the source of Imogene's unhappiness? Why is she so jealous of Janet? Of Beverly? What do these women have that Imogene wants?

6. Lillian claims her fowl mood is because Imogene refuses to sell the house. Do you think that is true? What other factors could be contributing to her mood?

7. Discuss the character of Linda Schwartzman. She was born in the area, but is the only newcomer to this group of women. In what ways is she different than they are? In what ways is she the same? How important is their friendship to her?

8. Agatha has a close relationship with Father Healy and religion plays a large part in her life. How has Catholicism shaped her life since childhood? What role does the church play in her decisions and, later, in her guilt?

9. What are the reasons that Beverly feels she must return to Agatha? Does she accomplish what she hoped by returning? Why is it so hard for Beverly to simply thank Agatha?

10. Does Agatha sin when she turns Calista into Dort? What affect does that lie have on Calista? On Agatha? On the entire town? In the end, was the lie worth it?

11. How does the flood affect each of the women in Agatha's house? How does that time change each of them?

12. Why does Agatha feel it is so important to bring together all her lodgers from the flood a year later? Is her breakfast a success? How important is it to these women to maintain their friendship? Why?

Author Bio

Jon Hassler is the author of eleven novels, two short-story collections, and two works of nonfiction. He is Regent's Professor Emeritus at St. John's University, Minnesota. He and his wife, Gretchen, divide their time between Melbourne Beach, Florida, and Minneapolis, Minnesota.

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