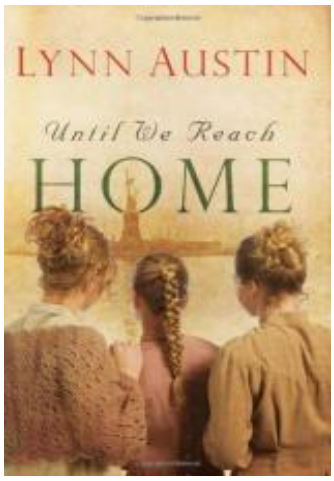
Until We Reach Home

by Lynn Austin



About the Book

Life in Sweden feels like an endless winter to Elin Carlson after the deaths of her parents. When circumstances become unbearable, she determines to find a safe haven for her sisters.

So begins their journey to America...the land of dreams and second chances.

But as hardship becomes their constant companion, Elin, Kirsten, and Sofia question their decision to immigrate to Chicago. Will their hopes for the future ever be realized?

Discussion Guide

1. The relationship between sisters can be very close, yet siblings often view the same experiences from their childhood in a completely different manner. How did Elin, Kirsten, and Sofia each view leaving their homeland? The ocean voyage? The events in Chicago? How did each sister react to the deaths of their parents?

2. What word would you use to describe each sister?s personality? What attribute was most memorable? What were each one?s strengths and weaknesses?

3. Which sister changed the most over the course of the novel? What specific events brought about that change? Was there a turning point for each sister?

4. On the night before landing in America, the passengers talked about their hopes and dreams for their new life. ?As each person shared his own tiny sketch of the country, the finished picture resembled paradise? (page 99). What was each sister hoping for? Were her hopes realized?

5. What do you think seeing the Statue of Liberty for the first time meant to the sisters --- and to the boatloads of immigrants who made the journey to America? Compare the experience of an immigrant in the late 19th century to immigrants today. What has changed? Remained the same?

6. In what way was the ordeal on Ellis Island traumatic for each sister? In what way was the experience beneficial to each one? If you had immigrant ancestors, did the story help you to visualize the hardships and challenges they might have experienced?

7. The sisters? arrival at their aunt and uncle?s boarding house was, in many ways, disappointing. Do you think they learned any valuable lessons from their time there?

8. What secrets did each sister keep from the others? What kept each one from confessing? How might the story have changed if they had shared the truth with each other?

9. How would you describe the various men and the part they played in this story? Their brother Nils; Tor Magnusson; Uncle Sven; Eric and Hjelmer; Ludwig Schneider; Uncle Lars; Gustav Anderson; Knute Lindquist; Gunnar Pedersen.

10. What was each sister?s opinion of love and romance? Did it change during the course of the story? Why and how?

11. How would you describe each sister?s spiritual journey? What was her faith and her view of God like in the beginning? In the end? What caused the sisters? faith to grow? How might hardships and challenges draw us closer to God and to our loved ones?

12. Mrs. Anderson, the Fairy Queen, played an important role in the sisters? lives. What did they learn from her? What did she learn from them? What did you think of the legacy she left them? Why do you think she chose not to give them money?

13. Describe the steps each sister secretly took to ?save? herself and her sisters? Why do you think they took those steps in secret? How might the story have changed if they had consulted each other first?

14. The Carlson sisters --- and millions of other immigrants --- faced enormous challenges when they left their homes. What do you think their biggest challenge was? Have you ever experienced a time of ?leaving home?? Did the change live up to your expectations or were you disappointed? What was the biggest challenge you faced?

15. Kirsten complained that lugging their trunk from place to place was like carrying around a dead troll. What did the trunk mean to each of them? Where do you think it ended up?

16. Where does each sister ultimately find ?home??

Author Bio

Lynn Austin has sold more than one and a half million copies of her books worldwide. A former teacher who now writes and speaks full-time, she has won eight Christy Awards for her historical fiction and was one of the first inductees into the Christy Award Hall of Fame. One of her novels, HIDDEN PLACES, was made into a Hallmark Channel Original Movie. Lynn and her husband have three grown children and make their home in western Michigan.

Critical Praise

"Austin's most worthy new historical centers on the immigration experience. The characters grow spiritually, and readers will appreciate everything they had to get through to become the people they are at the end of the book."

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