



Truth & Beauty

By Ann Patchett
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Introduction

In *Truth & Beauty*, her frank and startlingly intimate first work of nonfiction, Ann Patchett shines a fresh, revealing light on the world of women's friendships and shows us what it means to stand together.

Ann Patchett and Lucy Grealy met in college in 1981, and, after enrolling in the Iowas Writers' Workshop, began a friendship that would be as defining to both of their lives as their work was. In her critically acclaimed and hugely successful memoir, *Autobiography of a Face*, Lucy Grealy wrote about losing part of her jaw to childhood cancer, the years of chemotherapy and radiation, and then the endless reconstructive surgeries. In *Truth & Beauty*, the story isn't Lucy's life or Ann's life, but the parts of their lives they shared. This is a portrait of unwavering commitment that spans twenty years,

from the long, cold winters of the Midwest, to surgical wards, to book parties in New York. Through love, fame, drugs, and despair, this book shows us what it means to be part of two lives that are intertwined.

Topics for Discussion

1. Ann and Lucy shared a deep and intimate bond. Is it only possible to form a relationship like that in early adulthood -- before careers are fully formed and long-term romantic relationships and children enter the picture? In what ways are our relationships with friends different than ones with our family members? Are they always different?
2. How does Lucy's struggle with illness and her own body shape her way of dealing with life and with the people around her? Lucy was an enormously talented writer. Did she use that gift as a way to make sense of life? Do you think writers and artists see the world differently, or more clearly, than other people?
3. Ann chose to write about their friendship in a very frank and intimate way -- to pay tribute to Lucy's life and their whole relationship by recording the moments of triumph and joy, as well as the times of anguish and despair. Would you have the courage to be so honest?
4. The writer's life seems to require a magical gift or creative spirit and incredible drive and focus. Are these qualities contradictory or complementary? What do you think enables writers to persevere through the years of "night jobs" in restaurants and bakeries while they work to realize their dream?