



The Summer of Naked Swim Parties

By Jessica Anya Blau
ISBN: 9780061452024

Introduction

Jamie Green will remember "the summer of naked swim parties" for the rest of her life. It's the summer in which she has her first serious boyfriend, Flip, who is three years older and comes with friends for Jamie's friends; it's the summer in which Jamie's older sister is away at Outward Bound, leaving Jamie with her parents (and very often the house) to herself; it's the summer in which Jamie's parents throw, yes, naked swim parties, leaving Jamie cringing with embarrassment. And it's the summer in which Jamie will be forced to confront love, loss, family, and heartbreak for the very first time.

The Summer of Naked Swim Parties is a passionate and poignant debut novel of one girl's coming of age in 1970s southern California—replete with stoners, hippies, surfers, bitchy girlfriends, first love, first heartbreak, and OP shorts.

Questions for Discussion

1. This book takes place at a moment in American history when the ideas of conformity and authority were being questioned. It is clear that Betty and Allen are not allowing themselves to lead their lives like their parents or grandparents before them did. How do you think the ideas of conformity and rebellion, and the ideals of the 1970s play into what happens to Jamie over the course of this summer?
2. Jamie is riddled with fears and worries. How do these anxieties shape Jamie and her life? How do fear and anxiety shape your life, if at all?
3. Jamie's family and the idea of her family are always hovering in the background of this story. In what ways do you think that Jamie's relationship with her family affects her actions and decisions? Of particular interest here might be the relationship between Jamie and her mother.
4. How do you think Jamie is changed through her relationship with Flip? Is this change permanent and will it shape who she becomes in the future?
5. If you were Jamie's mother or father, how would you have helped her navigate her summer? What would you have done differently from Betty and Allen?
6. Jamie's father is the only Jewish person she is aware of, as far as Jamie knows there are no African Americans in town, Renee points out to Allen that if Dog Feather were Mexican and not Native American that Betty would hire him to work in the garden instead of taking him to the museum. What does this say about this family? How does the homogenous nature of the town in which they live affect their lives? How does the inclusion or exclusion of peoples from other cultures affect your life?
7. Jamie's friendship with Tammy and Debbie becomes as tricky and difficult as an affair gone wrong. What impact does the friendship have on Jamie and the decisions she makes? How does Jamie change because of this friendship? Can a friendship impact your life as much as a love relationship and, if so, what are the friendships that have most influenced who you are today?
8. If you could have stepped into the novel at only one moment and told Jamie what she should or should not do, what advice would you have given her?
9. There is much in the book about faith and religion. Tammy and Debbie are Christians, Allan is Jewish, and Betty is an Atheist. Renee wants to be a Christian, and Jamie turns to the Chumash Celestial Gods for guidance. How do you think that faith and the ideas of faith guide Jamie in this story? And does faith, or the ideas of faith, help Jamie or complicate things for her?
10. What affect does the presence of Dog Feather have on the family?
11. How do you think all these people will turn out in twenty years? Will Allen and Betty still be married? Will Renee still be mean and snarky to Jamie? Where will Jamie be?

About the Author

Jessica Anya Blau is a graduate of the University of California, Berkeley and Johns Hopkins University, where she received her masters in fiction and where she currently lectures and teaches creative writing. In 2005, she was chosen as the Tennessee Williams Scholar at Sewanee Writer's Conference. Her stories have appeared in *The Sun Magazine*, *The First Line*, *Washington Square Magazine*, *Santa Barbara Independent*, and many more notable publications. *The Summer of Naked Swim Parties* is based loosely on her childhood in Santa Barbara.