



Porch Lights

By Dorothea Benton Frank
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Introduction

1. *Porch Lights* opens with an epigraph, a poem written by Edgar Allan Poe, and each chapter begins with a snippet from Poe's short story, "The Gold-Bug." How does the poem set the tone for the story that follows? What is the significance of the excerpts from the short story? How do these excerpts tie into the novel?
2. *Porch Lights* is a story of family of mothers and children. Compare and contrast Jackie and Annie. What is the source of friction between them their differences, or their similarities? What are they like as mothers? How do mother and daughter change as the summer progresses?
3. Dorothea Benton Frank beautifully captures the simple and enduring pleasures of family life. In our stressed out, too busy, overextended culture, do you think we've lost sight of these joyous moments? What are some of your favorite moments from the novel?
4. *Porch Lights* is also a story of friendship. Talk about the bond between Annie and Deb. What draws these women together? How do their different personalities complement each other?
5. Would you call Annie a romantic? Early on in the novel she admits, "Maybe I was too old for romance or a new love. But I refused to completely believe such a depressing thought because of Deb. She says that on the day you stop believing in love you may as well lie down and die. I think she may be right." Is love or the hope of it essential to living?
6. Annie and her estranged husband, Buster were separated for eleven years. Why didn't they divorce? Was it jealousy over the handsome neighbor, Dr. Steve Profker, that brought Buster back to Sullivans Island, or do you think he was looking for a way to reunite with Annie? What does Jackie learn about her mother, her father, and their relationship?
7. How have Jackie's experiences as an army nurse shape how she views the world around her the people and the events that unfold? Is it unfair of her to compare America with Afghanistan, or do her comparisons help keep her grounded? How does Annie's understanding of her daughter's experiences influence her viewpoint?
8. As the summer winds down, Jackie is determined to go back to Brooklyn. Why? What makes her change her mind? What role does Steve play in her decision? What is it about Steve that earns Jackie's trust?
9. Food is also central to the story. Annie loves to cook and entertain. For Jackie, "it seemed like people who cooked like mad just made work for themselves." Do you agree with her? How does the act of making a meal reinforce bonds of family and friendship? Is it work or a labor of love? By the end of the novel, do you think Jackie still thinks this way?
10. Sullivans Island is both the novel's setting and a character in its own right. What does the island mean to Annie, Deb, and Buster? What about Jackie and Charlie? Describe the island you discovered in the pages of *Porch Lights*. How does this special place help heal the characters' emotional wounds? Does a cottage on the beach like the Salty Dog sound like an inviting place to visit or live?
11. When Jackie arrives she wonders, "What is it about this crazy little island? What did it always feel so far away from the rest of the world?" Based on your impressions while reading *Porch Lights*, how would you answer her? What does Sullivans Island offer her and Charlie that Brooklyn does not?
12. Annie is proud of Sullivans Island's rich history and lore. What about the place you call home? Do you know any historical facts about the town in which you live?