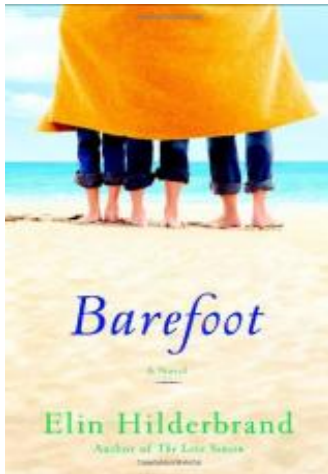


# Barefoot

by Elin Hilderbrand

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## About the Book

It's summer on Nantucket, and as the season begins, three women arrive at the local airport, observed by Josh, a local boy, home from college. Burdened with small children, unwieldy straw hats, and some obvious emotional issues, the women --- two sisters and one friend --- make their way to the sisters' tiny cottage, inherited from an aunt.

They're all trying to escape from something: Melanie, after seven failed in-vitro attempts, discovered her husband's infidelity and then her own pregnancy; Brenda embarked on a passionate affair with an older student that got her fired from her prestigious job as a professor in New York; and her sister Vickie, mother to two small boys, has been diagnosed with cancer. Soon Josh is part of the chaotic household, acting as babysitter, confidant, and, eventually, something more, while the women confront their pasts and map out their futures.

## Discussion Guide

1. *Barefoot* shifts in perspective between four primary characters: Brenda, Vicki, Melanie and Josh. Which character made the strongest first impression on you? Did you find that your favorite character shifted as the novel progressed?
2. The island of Nantucket plays a distinct and significant role in Elin Hilderbrand's novels. In *Barefoot*, how does Brenda, Vicki, Melanie's summer escape to the island allow them to more fully realize themselves?
3. Discuss the character of Josh's ex-girlfriend, Didi, in the novel. Ultimately, in what ways does she affect Josh's life and his outlook?

4. Initially Brenda resents Melanie's presence in their small 'Sconset cottage, in part due to Vicki's motivation to include her; as Brenda observes, "But it was also the case that Brenda's company alone had never been enough for Vicki." (pg. 4) How does Melanie's inclusion affect the group dynamic? How does it impact Brenda's relationship with her sister?
5. Josh encounters the advice "Be careful" several times throughout the novel. To what relationships do you think this warning most aptly applies in Barefoot? To what relationships does caution have no bearing?
6. Given that John Walsh is one year older than Brenda, do you feel that Champion University's response to their relationship is justified? Do you think the University's decision is ultimately productive for Brenda?
7. Discuss the role of fatherhood in the novel. Which father --- Tom Flynn, Peter Patchen, or Ted Stowe --- did you ultimately most admire? What does Josh learn about fatherhood by the summer's end?
8. Discuss Josh's employment as a babysitter and his role in Blaine and Porter's life. Why do you think Josh is so adept at taking care of Vicki's boys?
9. Throughout the novel, Vicki keeps a mental list entitled "Things That No Longer Matter." By the end of the novel, what have Brenda, Vicki and Melanie found matters most to each of them?
10. What does the future hold for Brenda, Vicki and Melanie after the novel's conclusion? How will the birth of Amber affect Melanie and Peter's relationship? How will Vickie cope with her recovery? Can Brenda undertake a new career? Finally, how influential will this summer on Nantucket prove to be in each of their lives?

## Author Bio

Elin Hilderbrand is the author of 30 novels, including her latest, *SWAN SONG*, which is her final Nantucket novel. She is a proud 1991 graduate of Johns Hopkins University where she majored in Writing Seminars. In her senior year at Hopkins, Elin had her first short story, "Misdirection," accepted for publication in *Seventeen Magazine*.

After a short stint working in publishing and teaching in New York City, she moved to Nantucket permanently in 1994. She attended the University of Iowa writers workshop and earned her MFA in 1998, and published her first novel, *THE BEACH CLUB*, in the summer of 2000. *SUMMER OF '69* was her first novel to debut at #1 on the *New York Times* bestseller list. She is the mother of three children and loves riding the Peloton, cooking and going to the beach.

## Critical Praise

"A wonderfully poignant behind-the-scenes journey into the world of high-end restaurants, island life, and the inner workings of the human heart. A great summer story."

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