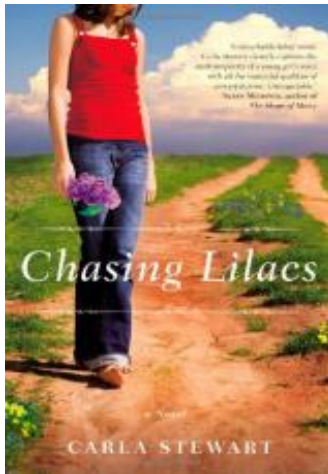


Chasing Lilacs

by Carla Stewart



About the Book

It is the summer of 1958, and life in the small Texas community of Graham Camp should be simple and carefree. But not for twelve-year-old Sammie Tucker. Sammie has plenty of questions about her mother's "nerve" problems. About shock treatments. About whether her mother loves her.

When her mother commits suicide and a not-so-favorite aunt arrives, Sammie has to choose who to trust with her deepest fears: Her best friend who has an opinion about everything, the mysterious kid from California whose own troubles plague him, or her round-faced neighbor with gentle advice and strong shoulders to cry on. Then there's the elderly widower who seems nice but has his own dark past.

Trusting is one thing, but accepting the truth may be the hardest thing Sammie has ever done.

Discussion Guide

1. Both in the beginning and after her mother returns from the hospital, Sammie is torn between caring for her mother and having fun with her friends. Do you think this is a normal response for a twelve year old girl? Have you ever been torn between duty and pursuing your own interests? How did that make you feel?
2. When did you first suspect that Rita (Sammie's mother) might still have "nerve" problems? What was the source of Rita's inner turmoil?

- 3.** Tuwana has been Sammie's best friend since first grade. Cly appears during the summer the story takes place. How are these friends different? What role do they each play in the story? Which friend do you think was closer to being a soul mate for Sammie? Do you find in your circle of friends those that fill different needs for you? Do you have a best friend? A soul mate?
- 4.** What clues were given about Rita's inner struggle? Could her suicide have been prevented? Were you able to identify the stages of grief Sammie went through following her mother's death? How did Sammie and her father grieve differently?
- 5.** The story is set in the 1950s. Does this era hold any special memories for you? How does the intimate setting of the petroleum camp affect the story? Are small, close-knit communities the same today as they were 50 years ago? How has our need today to encourage kids to be cautious with adults changed our view of community?
- 6.** Goldie and Slim are two very different adults who embrace Sammie. How have their own past experiences with grief and loss equipped them to be wise mentors? Have you had an older person mentor you? Have you ever mentored another person?
- 7.** Sammie's Aunt Vadine is a difficult person to like from her first appearance on the page. Did you think Sammie tried hard enough to get along with her aunt? Have you ever had a difficult person in your life? How did you handle it? What was the outcome?
- 8.** What was Sammie's relationship like with Joe, her dad? Why do you think he was unable to see what was happening between Sammie and Vadine? Do you think fathers today are more sensitive to their children's needs? How have parental roles changed in recent years?
- 9.** Brother Henry's response to Sammie about her mother's suicide wasn't definitive. Do you think suicide is the unforgivable sin? Have you ever been close to someone who committed suicide? What words of wisdom did you receive? Discuss what steps you took to reconcile the tragedy.
- 10.** Rita had many of the things Vadine felt were rightfully hers --- Joe, the pearls, a child who lived (Sammie), even the experience of meeting the author of *Gone with the Wind*. When did you first suspect Vadine had deep-seated jealousy and pain? How did she act this out? Were you surprised at her final act of desperation toward Sammie? Were you able to sympathize with her by the end of the story? Do you think Sammie forgave her?
- 11.** Have you ever longed to feel loved by someone you weren't sure loved you back? For Sammie, healing hinged on finding out if her mother loved her. What was Rita telling Sammie by putting the pearls and New Testament in her chest of drawers?
- 12.** The scent of lilacs occurs frequently in the story. How was this used as a literary device to tie Sammie and her mother together? Are there any smells that evoke specific memories for you?
- 13.** Tuwana was fond of predicting who would be Sammie's new mother. Do you think Joe and Olivia, Sammie's beloved teacher, have a future together? What do you predict will be the outcome? What problems might arise?

14. Both Sammie's mother and aunt had psychological problems based on inability to deal with traumatic events in their lives. What are the chances of Sammie having the same kinds of problems? What does the future hold for Sammie? Is she stronger or more vulnerable because of what happened in the story?

15. What role does faith play in dealing with psychological issues and/or the effects of past traumatic events?

Author Bio

Carla Stewart is an award-winning author. With a passion for times gone by, it is her desire to take readers back to that warm, familiar place in their hearts called "home." Carla's novels from FaithWords include CHASING LILACS, for which she won the American Christian Fiction Writer's Genesis Award, BROKEN WINGS, STARDUST, SWEET DREAMS, THE HATMAKER'S HEART, and her most recent work, A FLYING AFFAIR.

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