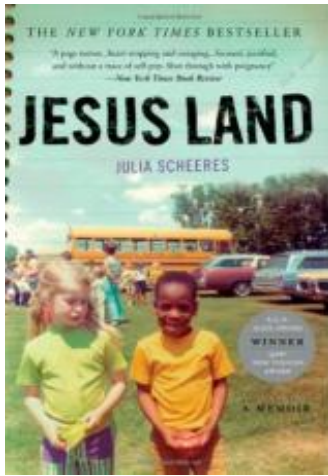


# Jesus Land: A Memoir

by Julia Scheeres



## About the Book

Sinners go to: Hell. Rightchuss go to: Heaven. The end is neer: Repent. This here is: **Jesus Land**. Julia Scheeres stumbles across these signs along the side of a cornfield while out biking with her adopted brother David. It's the mid-1980s, they're sixteen years old, and have just moved to rural Indiana, a landscape of cottonwood trees and trailer parks--and a racism neither of them is prepared for. While Julia is white, her close relationship with David, who's black, makes them both outcasts. At home, a distant mother--more involved with her church's missionaries than with her own children--and a violent father only compound their problems. When the day comes that high-school hormones, racist brutality, and a deep-seated restlessness prove too much to bear, their parents' solution is reform school--in the Dominican Republic. In this riveting memoir, first-time author Scheeres takes us with her from the Midwest to a place beyond imagining. Surrounded by natural beauty, the Escuela Caribe is nonetheless characterized by a disciplinary regime that demands its teens repent for their sins under boot-camp conditions. Julia and David's striving to make it through is told here with startling immediacy, extreme candor, and not an ounce of malice.

## Discussion Guide

1. Throughout **Jesus Land**, Julia oscillates between close identification with David (referring to "our color," for example), involuntary alienation from him (as when he and Jerome are pitted against the rest of the family), and intentional attempts to separate herself from him (as she does during high school). Does her perception of her relationship with David affect her perception of herself? How?
2. Julia and David have very different attitudes toward the concept of "family." What does it mean to be a family? Is Julia's cynicism about it ever belied by any of her family relationships? Are any of them a source of strength for her? Does David's enduring hope for an accepting, united family harm him? Is his faith in the concept ever justified?
3. Julia has a number of very different sexual encounters in the course of the memoir. How does each of them shape her

views about sex? Why do you think she doesn't tell David about Jerome?

4. Julia and David encounter a great deal of talk about faith. What do they have faith in? How does their faith differ from that of the adults around them?

5. People's reactions to David's race are a source of abuse -- both voluntary and involuntary. What are Julia's attitudes toward race and how do they affect David? Is race ever used as an excuse by characters in the book to justify other issues?

6. Do Julia and David learn anything worthwhile from their time at Escuela Caribe?

7. How do horseplay and humor figure into Julia and David's relationship? What about fantasy?

8. Does the effect Christianity has on the predominant culture differ between Indiana and Escuela Caribe? How is the religion interpreted to enforce the status quo? Does the rigidity of the Christian culture of Escuela Caribe ever make it easier to subvert?

9. Throughout the book, Julia describes and names the music she is hearing. How is music used by Julia, her mother, and the people at Escuela Caribe?

10. **Jesus Land** is written as a memoir focused around the relationship between Julia and David. How does the form affect your reaction to the story? How would you respond differently if it had been written as a novel based on real events, an expose of Escuela Caribe, a documentary on racism in Indiana, or some other format?

## Author Bio

Julia Scheeres is the author of *New York Times* bestselling memoir **JESUS LAND** and, most recently, **A THOUSAND LIVES: The Untold Story of Hope, Deception, and Survival at Jonestown**. She lives in Berkeley, California with her husband and two daughters and is a member of the San Francisco Writers' Grotto.

## Critical Praise

"The road out of an intolerant small town leads straight to a faith-based reform school in journalist Scheeres's scarifying memoir . . . A bristly summoning of unpretty events, conveyed with remarkable placidity."

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# **Jesus Land: A Memoir**

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