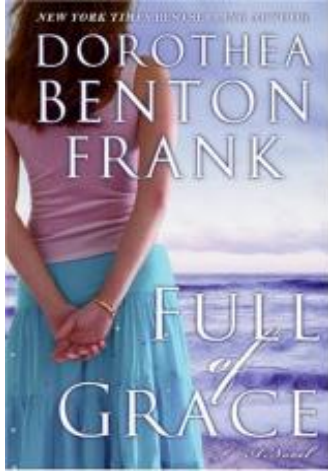


# Full of Grace

by Dorothea Benton Frank

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## About the Book

**The rich atmosphere of South Carolina, Hilton Head and Charleston, is brought vividly to life by Dorothea Benton Frank, a South Carolina native who, with her exquisitely evocative prose, makes you smell the sea air, see the palmettos and savor the sweet tea --- but this time it comes with a side of antipasti.**

Hilton Head, a South Carolina retirement heaven --- at least it's supposed to be, but for Big Al and Connie Russo, the move from New Jersey to this southern paradise has been fraught with just a few complications. Especially for their daughter, Grace.

Well, that's what she likes to be called. Her family insists on Maria Graziella. Seriously, enough with the Neapolitan. That might have been okay in New Jersey, but now it's just plain silly, and Grace at 32 is, horror of horrors, still unmarried. No wonder her family drives her crazy. Well, that and the fact that she's living with the man she would marry if they both weren't so commitment phobic. Michael is a doctor and a scientist and Grace is pretty sure he's also an atheist. Over the years, Grace has become a bit ambivalent about her faith, but her family is as old-fashioned Italian as they come. So the stage is set for a major showdown that just might change Grace's outlook on life, family and the New South.

## Discussion Guide

1. Grace Russo is a grown woman with an exciting job. What do you think is stopping her (besides his ethnicity) from introducing her live-in boyfriend, Michael, to her family? For a strong-willed woman, why do you think she doesn't stand up to her parents more?

- 2.** What do you think of the Russo family dynamic? Did you recognize any behaviors or traits that you have seen in your own family?
- 3.** Grace's family expects her to marry an Italian Catholic. Did/does your family impose their wishes onto you in terms of people to date and marry?
- 4.** How could Grace have handled the subject of Michael and introducing him to her family differently? If you were in her position, what would you have done?
- 5.** Why do you think that her brother's girlfriend, Marianne, and her Nonna's new beau, George, are accepted so easily?
- 6.** When contemplating spending Thanksgiving apart from Michael, Grace ponders, "I'm not sure anyone ever really enjoys family holidays." Do you agree? What is it about family holidays that can make them so fraught with drama?
- 7.** Why do you think Grace's family finally accepts Michael? Does it have more to do with his illness or finally realizing the depths of Grace's feelings for him?
- 8.** Grace has a realization about her mother: "Nicky and I stood there wondering just how guilty and insecure Nonna had made my mother feel all those years. And that there was something perverse in the way Dad let Nonna get away with it --- that Mom just took it --- and that Dad did nothing about it, perpetuated it. Families were crazy and they all had their secrets." How did Connie's relationship with her own mother affect her relationship with Grace? How does Grace try to break that cycle?
- 9.** Michael and Grace seemed to have such a loving and healthy relationship. Why do you think the subject of marriage never came up before? Do you think they have a solid foundation for a future together?
- 10.** So much of the story is about faith --- having it, believing in it, and the loss of it. Both Grace and Michael's faith is restored after witnessing a miracle. What did you think about the miraculous occurrence in Mexico?
- 11.** Why is the idea of faith more of a struggle for Michael than for Grace or her family? What role does Father John play in Grace's relationship with God and the church?
- 12.** Holiday traditions play a big role in the Russo family. What sort of traditions do you and your family like to observe? Are there any you would like to incorporate? Are there any you would like to end?
- 13.** How does your family inform the person that you become (or do they)?
- 14.** What message do you think the novel makes about family? About faith?
- 15.** The author hails from Sullivans Island, South Carolina. Do you think this aided in making her descriptions of Charleston and Hilton Head more vivid? Have you ever been to either place?

## Author Bio

Dorothea Benton Frank was the author of 20 bestselling novels set in the Low Country of South Carolina. She passed away on September 2, 2019 at the age of 67 following a brief struggle with leukemia.

Photo Credit: Debbie Zammit

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**Publication Date:** May 2, 2006

**Genres:** Fiction

**Hardcover:** 317 pages

**Publisher:** William Morrow

**ISBN-10:** 0060892358

**ISBN-13:** 9780060892357