

# The Things We Do to Make It Home

by Beverly Gologorsky

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## About the Book

In this poignant and unforgettable novel, the fierce repercussions of the Vietnam War are captured from an altogether original and touching angle. This story belongs to the women: the lovers, wives, and daughters who saw their men returned safely to them--but as unfamiliar, haunted souls who would forever be out of their reach.

Remember the American Dream. Beautiful House. Children. The Suburbs. He's in one piece. Safe at home. Ignore the reality. His fear of sleep. The imaginary person he talks to. The pills. The booze. The car parked miles away from the driveway. . . .

An emotionally charged story of passionate love, unfulfilled desire, and an American dream gone terribly awry, *The Things We Do to Make It Home* is a powerful portrayal of six women struggling to salvage their homes and their families while discovering the limits of devotion to help those they love. Though inviting comparisons to the work of Tim O'Brien and Bobbie Ann Mason, *The Things We Do to Make It Home* illuminates--in its own unique and unadorned style--the destructive effects of war on those who served and those who waited behind.

## Discussion Guide

1. Did this novel change your perspective on the Vietnam War? On the role of women? Why or why not?
2. Discuss the different kinds of damage inflicted by the war and its aftermath on the lives of these characters. Do you think there is any kind of damage control that could have averted some of these disasters?
3. The silences in this novel are so palpable and dangerous and destructive. Why do we often have so much trouble talking to the people we love?

4. Discuss the meaning and significance of the title of this novel.
5. Some of the men in this novel are homeless, transient, displaced. For men such as Rooster, the street seems the only place to be comfortable. Discuss the many reasons people end up on the street. Did this novel challenge your understanding of the homeless?
6. The women in this novel have to create new homes for themselves. What kind of homes do they create, if any, and how successful do you think they are in doing so?
7. Of all the veterans in this novel, Rod is the only one who seems to have a real home. Why do you think this is so?
8. Do you think Rod and Emma will resist and keep their house? What do you think will happen to them if they lose it?
9. Why does Frankie decide to return to Vietnam? Do you think this is a wise decision? Do you think he will find what he is looking for?
10. Do you think Frankie's encounter with J.J. in the bar is real or imagined or a bit of both?
11. In discussing her relationship with Frankie, Ida says, "There is something between us, a kind of space I can't get past." What has created this "space"? How does this space manifest itself in the various relationships in this novel?
12. Why is Frankie estranged from his sister Pauli? We do not hear her side of the phone conversations with Frankie. How do you think she would answer his questions?
13. There is a large cast of characters in this novel. Which character(s) and narrative threads do you find the most compelling? Is there a character you wished to hear more from?
14. Sara-Jo is so angry at her father, Rooster. Do you think she will outgrow this anger? Do you think she should outgrow it?
15. How does Sara-Jo's understanding of her parents' relationship change over the course of this novel? How does she help free her mother from the past?
16. These women are all struggling to determine the limits of love. Discuss what you think the limits of love are. Or should there be limits?
17. Which of these women do you think will finally free themselves from the demons of their collective past?
18. Can your group come to a consensus on a brief (one- or two-sentence) summary of this novel? Do you find that the various members of the group read books very differently and focus on different themes?
19. Why did your group select this novel? How does this work compare with other works your group has read? What will you be reading next?

## Author Bio

## Critical Praise

"Haunting...a novel brimming with burning emotion . . . The story is the strengths and silences of the women, beauticians and waitresses, who raise their children and watch the men go down their own hallucinogenic road, followed by demons."

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### **The Things We Do to Make It Home**

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