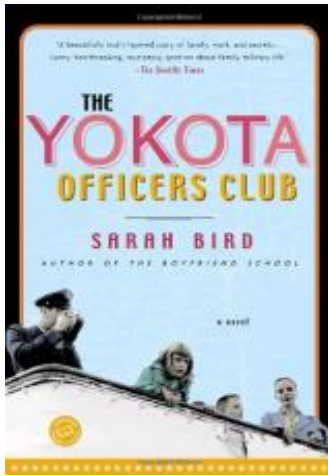


The Yokota Officers Club: A Novel

by Sarah Bird



About the Book

After a year away at college, military brat Bernadette Root has come "home"; to Kadena Air Base in Okinawa, Japan, to spend the summer with her bizarre yet comforting clan. Ruled by a strict, regimented Air Force Major father, but grounded in their mother's particular brand of humor, Bernie's family was destined for military greatness during the glory days of the mid-'50s. But in Base life, where an unkempt lawn is cause for reassignment, one fateful misstep changed the Roots' world forever. Yet the family's silence cannot keep the wounds of the past from reemerging . . . nor can the memory fade of beloved Fumiko, the family's former maid, whose name is now verboten. And the secrets long ago covered up in classic military style?through elimination and denial?are now forcing their way to the surface for a return engagement.

Discussion Guide

1. Smells play a major role in **The Yokota Officers Club**. They are even used as titles for each chapter. What effect did they have on you as a reader?
2. The central image/metaphor of the book is the perfume factory. At the end of the book, Bernie says: "That honeysuckle is but one link in an endless limbic chain that contains all the smells of my family and of our life together." Then she goes on to name all the smells in the book, concluding that "each smell is a blossom that combines with all the other smells the same way real flowers would in a real perfume factory where the days of sunshine and growing, the days of storm and drought, the times of plenty, times of want, what the flowers got, what they didn't get, they're all squeezed together under preposterous pressure or boiled or tinctured or distilled into a few drops of a smell so beautiful it can make you remember everything." Do you agree with this metaphor of how family unity/memories are created?

3. Understanding what you do about Moe, Macon, Fumiko, and Bernie, is there anything any of them could have done to change their fate?
4. Are the pressures a military life puts on soldiers--particularly the kind of military life Macon Root had, involving highly classified, highly dangerous missions--compatible with being a warm and loving spouse? Parent?
5. Have you known any military families? How much did you know about their lives? Did the novel give you a greater appreciation of those lives?
6. It seems that military brats enjoyed their peripatetic childhoods in direct relation to how extroverted they were. The more outgoing they naturally were, the more they thrived on the constant moving. How do you think you would have fared as a military child? As a military wife?
7. Have you ever had an experience similar to the one Bernie had when you return to the scene of a childhood memory and find it strangely shrunken or diminished in some way? How is this idea of a diminution, of a degradation, of, in some cases, a fall from grace, carried out in other ways in the book? In Bernie's experience of Okinawa as contrasted with her memories of Japan? In Mace's career? In the military in general from World War II to the Vietnam War? In Moe's experience both with the military and with her marriage?
8. Did you ever reveal a secret as a child? What were the consequences? Can Bernie or any child of that age be held responsible for unkept secrets?
9. Moe and Mace seem to have come to a stalemate in their marriage. Who is responsible? What do you predict will happen to them? What do you think should happen?
10. Contrast the two mothers in the book, Moe and Fumiko's mother. How does each one react to the stresses placed upon her and her family by their respective countries?
11. One of the themes of the novel is silence, the silence of men flying reconnaissance missions, but more especially the silence of the women around them. How does each of these characters find her voice: Bernie? Moe? Fumiko?
12. This novel straddles the line between fiction and memoir. Does it take the best from each approach or the worst? What do you like and dislike about the two different approaches?
13. Did you believe that Mace and Fumiko had had an affair? Were you relieved that they hadn't?
14. Since Bernie could not have ever seen her father acting as Wingo's co-pilot, how is the crucial relationship they had in flight demonstrated?
15. Humor and tragedy collide throughout the novel. Do you prefer fiction that blends these parts of life or keeps them separate?

Author Bio

Sarah Bird's novel, ABOVE THE EAST CHINA SEA, was longlisted for the Dublin International Literary Award. A Dobie-Paisano Fellowship helped in researching DAUGHTER OF A DAUGHTER OF A QUEEN. Raised in an Air Force family on bases around the world, Sarah is the child of two warriors, a WWII Army nurse and an Air Corps bombardier, who met at a barn dance in North Africa. She lives in Austin, Texas.

Critical Praise

"A LOVELY READ . . . [This novel] is a coming-of-age story, but one so ably fashioned, so tender at its core, that it can touch off both youthful longings and mature regrets in any reader with the slightest susceptibility to either."

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