

# *They Left Us Everything*

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Why is the title ironic?
2. What are the major themes in the book? Which theme do you find the most compelling? Explain.
3. One of the reviewers called the house “a character in its own right.” Do you agree? How does the setting and the house affect the story? Have you ever had a similar attachment to a house you lived in?
4. The author refers to having an Other Mother growing up. Did you have a similar experience with an Other Parent? How does a relationship with an Other Parent differ from that of a biological parent?
5. What were the most memorable scenes for you? Were there scenes in the book that upset you? If so, why?
6. What were the many contradictions between the mother and the father? To what degree was the behaviour of this couple a product of their time? Were they suitable marriage partners? Why or why not?
7. What do you think about the father’s ideas of child rearing? How are they different from today’s parenting approach?
8. How would you describe the author’s feelings towards her mother? Can you relate to those feelings? Explain.
9. Do you think parents should destroy their personal diaries or save them for their children to read in the future?
10. How does the relationship between a parent and child change as each grows older? What powers can elderly parents have over their children?
11. What parallels does the author draw between her relationship with her mother and her relationship with her youngest daughter? Why do you think the mother–daughter relationship is often complicated?
12. The author says of her mother: “I had more than sixty years to ask questions, but the questions didn’t form until after she’d gone. Now there are questions I didn’t even know I had.” Why do you think questions come to us later—after it’s too late? What sorts of questions do you think you would ask if you knew this was your last opportunity to do so?

13. As lifespans get longer, more and more people are torn between taking care of elderly relatives and taking care of their own immediate families. Describe some of the common challenges faced by this family in the story as well as those that were unique to them. Has society done a good job of keeping up with the needs of modern families? Why or why not?

14. Women are often expected to be the caregivers in a family. Do you think that being the only daughter in this family was a factor that contributed to the author's role in this story? Why or why not?

15. Describe the relationships among the siblings. Why do siblings often experience life within a family so differently? How would you describe your relationship with your siblings?

16. How would you describe the tone of the book? Does the tone work for the particular story the author is telling?

17. How did the book affect you? Did reading it help you to understand your own family better?