

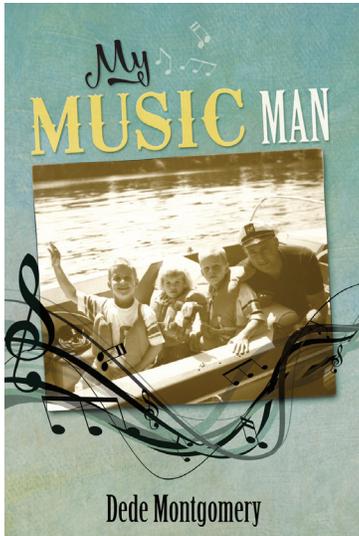


Reading Guide

My Music Man

by Dede Montgomery

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The author's dad was a Titan of the Willamette River. My Music Man uses stories of seven generations of family living near Oregon's Willamette River to illustrate the power of story telling. As she move through grief to accept the death of her dad, these stories shed light on change, acceptance and forgiveness among relationships and of natural landscapes. The reader is catapulted into autumn on the Willamette's riverbank in the 1960's with the author and her four brothers, where they discover their dad's own childhood stories and the intimate relationship he shares with the Willamette River. These memories detail picking berries and filberts, traveling through the West Linn locks by boat, and swimming in the Willamette River on a hot summer day overwhelmed by the smell of blackberry and carp.

Tales of generations of family in times of canoes, American Indians and steamboats weave between time periods; held together by the constancy of place. She shares small town life in a school where everyone knows everybody, and how it felt to be an only girl in what often felt like a never-ending sea of boys. The past intersects the present as she shares the recent death of her dad, pushing her into despair at the loss of her story teller, and music maker.

From the author

When my dad died I began to realize how much I would miss his story telling, the letters he wrote to us, and his knowledge of the Willamette and Columbia Rivers, and early Oregon. I began writing as a way to remember his stories, and in a way, to retrieve him. In doing it I realized the tremendous story just in our own relationship.

Discussion Questions

1. The author has chosen to build her plot around her personal experiences as a female, including early insights about gender bias and discrimination, and also include experiences of family females of other generations. Do you feel her own experience is common to many U.S. Women? Why or why not? Do you think this represents a specific generation of women?
2. The power of addiction, recovery and reconciliation is also a theme running through this book, particularly presented within the relationship of the narrator and her father. Initially the author didn't intend to include this in the book. Why do you think she chose to add it, and do you think that was helpful to what the book became?
3. The author expresses regret at development of land with the alteration of the natural environment, and yet attempts to share her understanding of the reality of growth. How does this theme strike you as you read the book. Are you sympathetic? Have you had things in your own life that have made you feel similarly or not?



4. For many families, when parents die, the relationships between siblings may change. The author makes a leap in asserting that the power of story helped keep her sibling group together following the death of her dad. Do you buy this? What have you noticed in your own life?

5. The author was challenged to weave multiple generations of stories into her book, including those of her children. Do you think she was effective in doing this? Did you feel that the transitions between time periods was easy to follow or not?

6. How did this book make you feel about Oregon and its beginnings as related to class, privilege and race? Did you learn anything new? Do you think the author romanticizes early Oregon due to her family roots?

7. Do you know much about your family history? How has it affected your you as you move through life? Did this book inspire you to think about something in your own life differently, or take an action on something?

About the author

Dede Montgomery is a six-generation Oregonian and a certified industrial hygienist working in research at Oregon Health & Science University, where she blogs in Oregon and the Workplace. Dede's family ties have instilled in her a deep connection to the land, and curiosity about life in early Oregon and the stories, good and bad, that lay there. In her book, Dede explores the jumbled path of forgiveness, reconciliation, courage and gratitude, through the memories and stories stirred after her father's death. Dede lives with her husband in West Linn, Oregon where she never tires of exploring new places along the banks of the Willamette River.