



# *That Summer in Franklin*

by Linda Hutsell-Manning

## Reading Guide

### Author's Introduction

I began the first draft of *That Summer in Franklin* in February 2000 at the Saskatchewan Writers' Winter Retreat, St. Peter's Abbey in Muenster, SK. I had two weeks there with none of those inevitable interruptions one has while writing at home. I had the two main characters, Colleen from my unpublished short story, "One Friday Night" and Hannah from another unpublished story, "Miss Purity Flour". I needed a plot to knit these two characters together and so I began writing, not knowing exactly where the story would lead.

Many drafts and many years later, the novel became what you read today. I had a wonderful time, researching and reliving the fifties and, as well, I broadened my knowledge and understanding of dementia and alcoholism, both complex issues.

I hope the novel speaks to you and leads you to a fuller understanding of family and friendship - the joys, complications and heartbreaks. Thanks for reading and please send me an email with your comments/feedback/thoughts.

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### Description

In 1955, two fifteen-year-olds Hannah Norcroft and Colleen Miller work as waitresses in small town Franklin's prestigious Britannia Hotel. Even though the owner's sixteen-year-old son, Larry Mourand harasses them and, Charlie, the kitchen helper's sudden death frightens them, tips are good. Forty years later, in 1995, as each admits a failing and elderly parent to Franklin's Sunset Lodge, the

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women meet again. Other than their connection during that long ago summer, their commonality factor is zero. Hannah, single with a younger lover, is a successful Toronto high school teacher while Colleen, who married early, has five children and has never left Franklin. When a reporter, writing about the history of the old hotel, researches Charlie's death, these two women are forced to deal with the traumas of *That Summer in Franklin*.

## **Questions**

1. In *Hannah I*, Hannah says, "No one now believes what small-town fifties life was like—not with their smart phones and morning-after pills and rap lyrics. But it wasn't like *Leave It to Beaver* and *Happy Days* and all the other TV cardboard-cutout versions of the decade."

**For readers of a certain age, the fifties will be familiar territory. What do you remember about that decade? Dress, music, dating, food, movies, singers etc. How was it different/the same as the TV shows above?**

**For younger readers, what is your impression of the fifties? Your parents' era perhaps? What influences from the fifties still linger in our society today?**

2. In *Colleen I*, we find that Colleen, without telling her dad, has already made arrangements for him to move into the local nursing home, Sunset Lodge.

**Do you think this is underhanded of Colleen or do you think extenuating circumstances have forced her to make this decision? Discuss the difficulties she faces and what other choices she could make.**

3. In *Hannah II*, from Hannah's remembered date with Gordon Ellis: "From the perspective of fifties societal mores, anyone then would have put the blame squarely on her. He was just hoping to sow some wild oats. She thinks about her teenage moms, caught like flies on life's sticky paper. Stuck there with reality and dirt flecks. She was lucky, really, physically strong and aggressive when shoved down onto the car seat. Furious and fighting back. They came here to watch a movie, after all."

**Date rape was not a term used in the 1950s. When did this change and how? What knowledge/help did teenage girls in the 1950s have to draw on? Teenage girls today are, ostensibly, much more sexually knowledgeable. How is date rape viewed today? Does advertising/media play into this scenario and, if so, how?**

4. In the opening paragraph of *Colleen II* we read: "They all call it the accident, not just Colleen, even though no one else in the family has read

about denial.”

**Why does Colleen call the accident denial? Discuss whether or not denial has actually helped Colleen. Would there be a better alternative for her to follow dealing with her dad? Her life? How would she go about this?**

5. In the hospital room, in *Hannah III*: “So nice of you to visit,” her mother warbles, staring up at her now. Hannah is sure her mother doesn’t have the slightest notion who she is. . . Social etiquette, like a fine-meshed sieve, letting everything else sift through, still there giving shape and logic to conversation”.

**Discuss the underlined sentence as relating to Hannah’s mother. Is her behavior a result of her being a product of her generation or is it because of her illness or a combination of both?**

6. In *Hannah III*, after Hannah’s first brief interchange with Maureen dealing with Mrs. Norcroft in the hospital, Hannah muses: “Amazing how chance meetings, planned meetings, human encounters in general promote chat even conversation, but rarely communication.”

**What things stand in the way, now, of communication between Hannah and Maureen? This question begs the issue of social class, not something Canadians like to admit exists. Is there a social class structure in small town life today? If yes, is it more or less than forty years ago? What are the reasons for this?**

7. “Never say never”. In *Colleen III*, Colleen wonders who said that. “Why is it that, so many times in life, we do exactly what we say we won’t do, what we hate.”

**Is this a reasonable thing to say? Why, do you think Colleen says this? What other alternatives did she have in her life? Discuss the importance of life choices when we are in high school and how life frequently modifies what we think we are going to do in life.**

8. In *Hannah IV*, Hannah’s mom has a Victrola to play records. It seems so antiquated by today’s standards. That and the 78 records are antiques in our eyes.

**If someone in your group remembers, have them tell you about the Victrola and the old 78s. If no one remembers, research it and report on how one worked. Make a list, by decade, of what came after and how our expectations changed. In the 1950s and even into the 1960s families had other types of home entertainment. Talk about these and whether any have survived. What have we lost? Gained?**

9. From Britannia Then, page 104: "Female employees in the fifties had few options. Harassment was common; reprisal almost nonexistent. Whatever each girl thought about Larry, she kept to herself, neither willing to share information with such sexual overtones, not wanting to be seen as being morally loose, storing it as far back in her mind as possible. This summer job was there and each would see it through to the end, no matter what."

**Talk about sexual harassment then and now. Are girls safer now than in the 1950s? What has made this so? There are groups of working women still highly vulnerable and open to sexual harassment. Who are these women and why is this so?**

10. The closing words of Hannah V: "Short-term memory versus long-term memory, Hannah thinks. . . Fear of reprisal, embarrassment or both aid and abet long-term memory."

**Short-term memory loss is much discussed today in the media. Talk about whether or not Hannah's statement is one of over-reaction to the situation.**

11. In Hannah/Colleen I, the personality and lifestyle differences between the two women come face to face. Each woman tries to hide from the other what she perceives to be her and her parent's shortcomings.

**Talk about why each woman feels the way she does and whether it is important in the short term, the long term. Compare these to meeting old friends/acquaintances at a class reunion. Think about what makes these meetings smooth or rough. As they get older, do people continue to "put their best foot forward" or are they more willing to "tell it like it is"?**

12. At the end of Hannah/Colleen II, when Hannah returns to her mother's house after visiting Colleen and her family on Christmas Eve, she says: "Here's to Christmas Eve 1995. Here's to what we all make of our lives."

**Why does she say this? Has her visit with Colleen changed her thinking about**

**herself? How? Will this modify her reserve toward other people and, if so, how?**

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13. In Colleen VIII, the meeting between the two sisters is more than a little difficult. Colleen's reaction is as expected; Lillian, however, seems impervious until after they find the will.

**Death often brings out the best and worst in people. How does Frank's death do this for Colleen, for Lillian? What has each misunderstood about the other and why?**

14. In Hannah VIII, Hannah spends time with Aunt Harriet and makes this observation: "So be it, Hannah thinks, and a millisecond later she feels a lightening flash of clarity, one of those forever earmarked realizations - it's all right when Harriet reacts that way. It doesn't make Hannah angry or defensive because there is no baggage attached. Harriet has a perfect right to say what she thinks. If Hannah could only sever the baggage, toss it away, she could be so much more compassionate with her mother."

**Discuss this observation and why it is so important to Hannah.**

15. After Allan Searp interviews Hannah and Colleen, we find the following observation: "He's smart enough to know he can say so much and no more, not if he intends to stay here for the next five years. Franklin is still a small town; the Britannia still carries an aura of its past glory. Tarnishing that image would not, politically, be in his best interest."

**Talk about the implications of this statement for Allan, for Hannah and for Colleen.**

16. In Hannah/Colleen IV, Colleen muses: "No one's life is what it seems, that's for sure. It's all on top, and underneath, it's another whole kettle of fish"

**Talk about how this applies to Hannah, to Colleen. Are there other characters in the novel for which this rings true? If so, consider them in this light as well.**

17. After Hannah's meeting with Professor Hendricks in Hannah X, she considers how she "has deliberately worked to control trauma in her life. Her ideal goal is to exist in a trauma-free zone, 365 days of the year. Given this, she weighs every decision carefully, pragmatically. It occurs to her that, even though over the last couple of months her trauma quota has

substantially increased, she feels no less secure. Almost, she is loath to admit, the opposite.”

**Why, do you think, Hannah is “loath” to admit that the events of the past month have made her feel more secure?**

18. After Colleen reads the newspaper article in Colleen X, she asks Art about Potter’s Field at the Fairgrove Cemetery.

**Is there at Potter’s Field section in your local cemetery? When was it begun and is it still in use today? If not, find out when this custom stopped and why.**

19. “Life is what happens to you while you’re busy making other plans.”

**Discuss this famous John Lennon comment in relation to Colleen and to Hannah. What were the expectations of each woman at the beginning of the novel and how has this changed each of their plans by the end?**