

Book Club Questions – No Place Like Home

Hiraeth is a Welch word that has no direct English translation. In its simplest translation it means homesickness, but it is so much more than that. It expresses the intense bond someone feels to their place of home, an earnest longing for those familiar roots, and a sense of regret over being elsewhere. This complex word so sums up Jewel's feelings about home, especially when contrasted against the complicated reasons she wanted to leave it. The circumstances in her life in New York change so drastically so fast, she has no choice but to return to this place. Do you think she would have eventually heeded the intense tug of those roots and returned to Pueblo on her own, or do you think only a lack of other choices would be the motivating factor to force her back?

As a young adult, Jewel made choices that set into motion a series of irreversible events. Do the choices we make as young people haunt us forever, or do you think there are possibilities for redemption and second chances?

No Place Like Home is about Jewel Sabatino and her return home to discover who she is, yet at the heart of the story is another character all together—Michael, the king of the fairies. Everywhere he goes, he attracts people and is the glue that binds everyone together. Even when Michael comes home from the hospital towards the end of the book, his bed is placed in the heart of the house. We see how close he and Jewel are, but what role do you think he has really played in Jewel's life?

Jewel has an immediate reaction to Malachi, and in their first meeting they share a reciprocated lightning bolt of lust. Is this kind of recognition found only in the stories we read, or have you ever had this kind of reaction to someone?

During their first dinner with Malachi at the house, Jewel changes bras from the white one that sees her through the responsible roles in her life—the businesswoman and the mother and caregiver—and digs into the bottom of her drawer for a dangerous black one made of soft lace. That the more appealing and less utilitarian choice resides hidden in a far place in the drawer could be a metaphor for women and the competing roles women have to balance in their lives. Do women have to choose between one or the other, or can women be both at the same time?

Barbara O'Neal writes about Pueblo in a way that makes the people, sights, sounds, taste, smells and natural world of the Southwest come alive. She also gives Pueblo a small town feel by connecting its residents by two degrees of separation. Nine times out of ten, Jewel could find a connection with a stranger in five minutes or less. What is your town like? Do you have a multi-layered connectedness with your neighbors, or do you have relative privacy and anonymity? What are the pluses and minuses of both kinds of communities?

The Sicilian tradition is a fencepost that props up one of the main story lines of this book. It is a proud and unyielding tradition where its followers abide by the rules or suffer the consequences. Both Jewel and her father, Romeo, have a sense of pride in direct conflict with

this tradition that has cost them years of time together. Tradition is important in many cultures, but are there times when these traditions can be molded into something else or do you think tradition is something that has been too compromised and therefore lost when making accommodations for it?

No Place Like Home is a story about sisterhood, family, friendship and love. There is the romance with Malachi, Jewel's return to the community she left behind, the rebuilding of her relationships to the family she abandoned, reconciling with her father, mothering a rebellious teen, and facing the approaching death of the best friend she cannot bear to lose. Did you find any part of the story more compelling than the others? What about that part spoke to you?

At one point Jewel's sister, Jordan says to her: "I hate it that you're sinking back into that apologetic mode. You had so much fire while you were gone—and your bravery made me brave." In coming back home, Jewel started to revert back to old behaviors and losing the growth she had achieved while away. We all have certain roles that we have played in our families and our relationships have all sprouted from those roles we have played. Do you think we are ever able to grow past them, or do family dynamics keep us in these places?

Jewel is terrified that the demons that claimed Billy will also come for her son, Shane. Do you think there is such a thing as a genetic cycle—something pre-ordained—or do you think free will can override it?

Shane uses his guitar as a way of unwinding and exploring his emotions just as Jewel uses cooking to deal with the stress in her own life . . . using art as a form of therapy. Is there an activity/art/hobby in which you engage as a form of therapy?

Shane expresses doubts about pursuing a music career and in response Jewel says, "What would the rest of us do without music? We rely on all of you to accept that not-easy life so that we can get through ours." Do you have a soundtrack to your life? A song that immediately transports you to a certain time and place, full of memories and nostalgia?

Barbara O'Neal includes many food references in her books and writes about these various dishes and ingredients in a luscious and sensual way. In No Place Like Home, she includes a number of recipes for the dishes mentioned in the story. Do you like when authors include these recipes as part of the book? Have you ever tried to make any of the dishes from the books you have read? Please share and exchange recommendations!