

The Goodbye Summer

Readers/Discussion Guide

The kind of women I usually write about have strong personalities and a lot of definite—not always right—opinions. But Caddie in *The Goodbye Summer* is shy and backward, a lonely-spinster sort of heroine who probably wouldn't have budged from her muted, uneventful life if her grandmother hadn't broken her leg and gone to recover at Wake House.

Caddie's a reactor rather than an actor, and that suited the book—which is a bit of a Cinderella story when you think about it, with a fairy godmother and an unlikely prince—because that way her new friends at Wake House would have more to teach her. In other words, I wanted Caddie to have a long way to go.

I also wanted to invent my own nursing home. About forty years ago my best friend and I promised each other that, when the time came, we'd go to the same old folks' home and sit on the porch in side-by-side rockers, keep each other company and never be lonely. Forty years ago! It's not quite nursing home time for us yet, but it is for our parents. Mine are in a wonderful, caring place, but it only resembles Wake House in one way: it's a community. When summer fades and the winter of our lives sets in, I think that's the best we can hope for. And it's everything.

1. What's the worst thing about getting old? Cornel's list of complaints makes it sound like hell. Are there any benefits to old age?
2. Thea has a brighter outlook, in spite of what she knows about her own prospects for a long life. Which character do your own opinions about old age more closely resemble?
3. Wake House isn't a typical nursing home. In some ways it's more like the author's fantasy of the ideal old folks' home. What's yours?
4. What was Caddie's problem? Why was she so shy and fearful?
5. Her old therapist told her she had "abandonment issues" she needed to resolve. Thea told her it was time to move on. Who do you think was right?
6. Why do you think McGill fell for Caddie? Think it will work out for them?
7. When she writes her biographies for her Wake House friends, Caddie always asks them if they have any regrets. Most say no, although Nana says, "You know what I hate? People who say they have no regrets." What do you expect to regret at the end--if anything? What's the nature of regret? Do we all tend to regret the same things, or at least the same category of things, chances not taken, words not said, paths not followed—fundamentally, lapses in personal courage or generosity?
8. Henry Magill makes feet. Did the author pull that occupation out of the air, or is something going on here, a motif or some hint about his character?
9. Jane, Caddie's mother, died when she was nine, and she wasn't much of a mother

anyway. Nana raised Caddie. Then Thea came along. What did each woman contribute to Caddie's character, positively or negatively? Which one had the most influence on her? Did either of them "save" her? If not, who did? Or did anyone?