



YOUR BOOK CLUB RESOURCE

READING GROUP GUIDE

Discussion Questions

1. Who are your own sister friends forever in your life and how do they influence you?
2. What are some rituals you have with your closest friends? Do you believe those rituals play a major part in sustaining your relationship with them?
3. Which of the four sister friends do you identify with the most: Serena, Michelle, Kenya, or Lynette? And why?
4. The four friends grapple with how they want to balance love, family, and their professional lives. If your friend was facing the same choices, what would be your number one piece of advice?
5. Lynette regrets having given up her career to raise her family. What do you think about the idea of one parent staying home with the children? Would you do it? If you have, or your spouse has, what were the discussions that took place to come to that decision? And did the arrangement work out well for you?
6. When you think about the ideal dating or marital relationship, what is the most important aspect to you?
7. Do you think money and security are necessary in a relationship? If so, do you know women like Serena who believe it means everything? If so, can you share an example?
8. Serena, Michelle, Kenya, and Lynette have been best friends for a really long time, but to some degree, Kenya and Lynette have a special bond, as do Serena and Michelle. Can you relate to this dynamic in terms of having multiple best friends? If so, please explain.
9. Michelle struggles with the idea of marrying a man she loves versus marrying a man she is truly *in* love with. Do you know women who married a man simply because he was a good guy and a great provider? If so, how did things work out for them?

10. Michelle's parents were unable to come to terms with her breaking off her engagement to pursue a relationship with Steven. Do you believe parents or anyone else should have a say-so, one way or the other? Please share your thoughts.
11. Kenya's husband has an ex-wife and son, but the last thing his ex-wife, Terri, wants is a blended family. Have you experienced this personally? If so, please explain.
12. Do you feel satisfied with how each woman's relationship and life resolved at the end of the story? Why or why not?

Author Q&A

Q. What inspired you to write a story about four friends and their different life stages?

A. Primarily, I wanted to write about four women who have been best friends for more than three decades, yet after all these years, they are still exceptionally close and loyal to one another. Additionally, I wanted to explore the four relationship statuses—being single, engaged, married, and divorced.

Q. The family and friendship dynamics in the book are incredibly complex. How much of those dynamics were inspired by real life, whether yours or someone else's?

A. In 2021, my best friend Kelli and I celebrated fifty years of friendship, and my best friend Lori and I celebrated thirty-five years of friendship, and they are certainly my sister friends forever. So while none of us can completely relate to the characters and overall storylines in the book, my bond and friendship with the two of them is very similar. They are always there for me, I am always there for them, and I love them the same as though they were my biological sisters.

Q. As the New York Times bestselling author of twenty-seven novels and one faith-based, nonfiction title, you've had plenty of experience with the writing process. Did you do anything different with this book, with its four protagonists, each with her own point of view?

A. What I did first was decide on the specific social issues I wanted to write about, then I mentally created my four main characters, wrote a four-page synopsis, and outlined the first twenty-plus chapters. From there, I wrote the actual chapters, outlined another five chapters at a time, and wrote those, and I

continued in this manner until my first draft of the manuscript was complete. Then I began working on rewrites and revisions. So for the most part, I didn't change my standard writing process very much. Although, I will say that this was my first time writing a novel with four points of view, which was a little more difficult because the most I've written about at the same time, in the past, were three.

Q. Your faith always plays a prominent role in your books. Why is it important to you to weave that into your characters' lives and motivations?

A. My faith and Christian values are very important to me, and although the majority of the books I have written are fiction, as a writer, I always feel led internally to include what I believe, as it relates to a person's moral and family values. Specifically, as it relates to treating others the way we want to be treated and then portraying what happens when we don't. I also love including a good amount of forgiveness and redemption because we are all human and everyone makes mistakes.

Q. Is there one friend in the book whose story excited you the most and you want to explore more?

A. In truth, I was excited about all four storylines, but I must say that it would be nice to see Lynette fall in love with a man who loves and cherishes her and one who loves her daughters as his own. Because while meeting the right person isn't always easy, there is definitely life after divorce.

Q. What is one thing you want readers to take away from reading Sister Friends Forever?

A. My hope is that readers will recognize who their true friends are—because sadly, not every friend is a devoted one. I also hope readers realize how super important it is to love and celebrate other women—how crucial it is to genuinely become their sister's keeper.

Q. What do you like to do when you're not writing?

A. I love relaxing and spending time at home with my husband, Will. I also love watching TV dramas, both series and movies.

Q. What piece of advice would you give aspiring writers?

A. My advice would be to write at least something every single day, even if it is only a paragraph or a page. Also, no matter what, please write in your own voice and straight from your heart and never try to mimic someone else's writing style or genre. Additionally, you should study the craft of writing and definitely learn every single thing you can about the business of publishing.

Author Essay

For me, there is nothing that compares to having true friends—especially sister friends forever. Why? Because women need other women. And also because being loved and supported by other women is simply priceless. I, of course, know this all too well because not only do I have my two dear cousins, Patricia and Janell, my dear daughter-in-law, LaTasha, and a great number of other dear women friends in my life whom I love as though they were my biological sisters (you all know who you are), I also have my two best friends whom like the women in this book, I have been friends with for many years. These two women, Kelli and Lori, are my sisters in every sense of the word, so along with all the other fabulous friends I have in my life, I am beyond grateful to say that I have the most amazing circle of friends any woman could ever hope for, many of whom you have also seen me acknowledge in my previous work.

But whenever someone inquires about who I have been friends with the longest and after all these years I am still very close with—similar to the way the women in *Sister Friends Forever* are—the answer is Kelli. And how long have we been friends you might ask? Well, in 2021, she and I celebrated fifty years of friendship. Fifty wonderful years that I thank God for, and I wouldn't trade for anything because when I say that Kelli is my true ride-or-die girl through everything, she absolutely is. We share with each other the good, the bad, and the ugly. We are totally and completely transparent about our personal lives, our work lives, our struggles, fears, failures, dreams, goals, and successes, and we never feel hesitant about sharing any of it. We listen to each other without judgement, we root for and celebrate one another, and most of all, we stand by each other through everything. And that, in and of itself, provides us with the kind of sisterly support system that makes us each feel safe.

It is also the reason that with the exception of my husband, Will, whenever anything happens—fantastically great or incredibly bad—Kelli is usually the first person I call. Because when I do, I know she is going to be just as happy as I am about any good news I have to share with her, and she is also going to listen and give me sisterly advice about any not-so-great news I might have. In turn, with the exception of her husband, Brian, she is usually going to call me right away about any news she has as well.

But this is what true friends do. This is how best friends show their genuine compassion and loyalty for one another and how sister friends keep each other lifted up, even in the worst of times. And here's something else: Even though Kelli and I have rarely lived in the same state, we have still remained best friends. I mean, it is true that we were both born in Rockford, Illinois, less than four months apart. But we didn't meet until we were six years old, because before then, Kelli lived in Detroit, Michigan, with her parents. However, when it was time for us to enter first grade, she returned to Rockford to spend the school year with her grandparents, who just so happened to live one block down the street from my family.

Still, this wasn't where we first met. Our first meeting actually took place at our city's 4-H fair, an annual event that both our grandparents had taken us to that summer. And from that moment on, we became fast friends. So much so, that even though Kelli went back to Detroit for second grade, she still visited her grandparents every single summer throughout our entire childhood, and I so looked forward to seeing her, going skating with her, going to see movies, and playing at the park... every single summer. We had such fun times, and now when she and I reminisce about our childhood and the neighborhood we grew up in, we often think about how those particular times were some of the best and happiest moments of our lives.

Then fast-forwarding to our early-adult lives through today, we still laugh together, we sometimes have three-hour-plus phone conversations, we pray for one another, and we enjoy time together with our husbands when we visit each other's home. So again, when I say Kelli is my sister friend forever, she is, in more ways than I can explain.

But not only is Kelli my best friend and sister, she is the reason that Lori also became my best friend and sister, as it was Kelli who introduced the two of us back in March 1986—and as a result, in 2021, Lori and I celebrated thirty-five years of friendship.

Like Kelli and I, when Lori and I met, we became fast friends and nine months later, we rented an apartment together. Originally, we'd both lived in separate one-bedroom apartments, but to save money and to afford a much larger place, we looked for a two-bedroom apartment, found one we loved, and moved in. And as Lori will attest to, when you can live together for just over two years without ever having a single argument and without any other over-the-top drama, it says everything—and it means everything. And I will forever cherish all the fun and happy times we shared together as young women who were only in our early twenties. Then, as the years continued and we both got married, we became even closer, and until this very day, Will and I still spend time with Lori and her husband, Ulysses, at their home every Christmas Eve, eating good food and exchanging gifts. We also rarely miss attending each other's family get-togethers or other special occasions. So while Lori and I have always been best friends, family quickly became a huge part of our relationship.

This was something I had always recognized about our friendship, but when my mom became ill and soon began deteriorating, Lori stepped in to help me no differently than had she been one of my blood relatives. And no matter how many years pass by, I will never be able to thank Lori enough for being there for me in such a caring and dedicated way. She loved my mom, and I loved her mom, but when my mom became ill, Lori went over and above without being asked to do anything. She simply did what she thought needed to be done, and she did that until the very end. But for anyone who knows Lori personally, what they will tell you is that Lori has a huge heart and loves helping others. Especially, those who are sick or elderly, and this speaks volumes about who she is as a person. This is who she has been for the more than three decades that I have known her, and I am forever grateful to call her my best friend.

I am also beyond grateful to have such a special bond with two women who are my girls for life. Two women who are always there for me, no matter what, and who love me just as I am. Two women who I would do anything for and who I love with my whole heart.

Two awesome women of God who mean the world to me—and who are my beautiful sister friends forever.

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