

BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daughter of Spies: Wartime Secrets, Family Lies

By Elizabeth Winthrop Alsop



The author's mother never talked about her past when her children were growing up. Do you think this is usual for parents in general or is it particularly typical for people who have lived through a war? Have you experienced this with your own parents?

In this memoir, the author uses a technique called a “braided narrative”, moving back and forth from her parents’ past to caring for her mother in the present day. Why do you think she chose this way of telling this

particular story?

The author speaks often about her five brothers. What effect did growing up in the middle of a pack of boys have on her childhood experiences as well as her choices and decisions later in life?

The author uses both the present and the past tense in this book. Can you see a pattern in why and when she uses one over the other? What do those choices reveal about her feelings as she narrates each scene?

When the author consulted [William Zinsser](#), the author of *On Writing Well*, about this memoir, he [told](#) her that “she couldn’t write about both of her parents in the same book. You have to choose one.” The author has chosen to focus on her mother in this memoir. Would you have liked to hear more about other family members and if so, who? What questions would you pose to the author about these people?

Tobias Wolff, author and memoirist, cautions writers “to take no care for their dignity” when they come to consider writing a memoir. “Don't be afraid of appearing angry, small-minded, obtuse, mean, immoral, amoral, calculating, or anything else.” Do you think this author “took no care for her dignity” in telling her story? In what scenes or chapters?

How does the author grow or change in the process of telling her family history? What does she come to learn not only about her parents but also about herself? What can you imagine were the reactions of other family members on reading this memoir?

What are the scenes that you remember now having just finished the book? What scenes do you think you will remember this time next year?

Which characters struck you most strongly, positively or negatively? Why?

Did reading the book trigger childhood memories of your own? Any you'd like to share?

This is a book about a mother/daughter relationship. Do you think the author treated her mother fairly? Did the book elicit memories of your own mother and your relationship with her, whether a daughter or a son?

Did you mark any passages as significant or meaningful and if so, which one/s and why?