

## READING GROUP CHOICES WITH JILL A. DAVIS

### **Q: Is it possible to be a good writer without being a good reader?**

JILL: Is it possible to be a good swimmer without enjoying the water? Probably not. People who write, probably tend to read a lot – or read a lot during childhood and adolescence. There is a familiarity with the rhythm of words, a certain cadence, that I think readers and writers tend to start to think in ...

### **Q: According to a report of the Independent Book Publishing Association, over five million American adults belong to reading groups. What, do you believe, is the basis for this country's love for literature and books?**

JILL: That's great to hear. Reading is such an intimate pursuit and for me that's largely my attraction to it. Of course most well-adjusted people probably like to balance the seclusion out with interaction with real live people.

### **Q. Have you ever belonged to a reading group?**

JILL: I have belonged to a reading group. There is a wonderful library around the corner from me in New York City. They have a great book club which is author-lead. Writers who volunteer to run the group do so for three months and they cover three books. Generally there is a theme that encompasses all of the books. There is a fiction and a non-fiction group and it's probably been one of the more interesting groups I've been involved with. Of course there were other book clubs but they seemed to have more to do with wine drinking which, of course, had its own merits.

### **Q: What advice do you have for reading group members when it comes to selecting books for discussion?**

JILL: I think there are all sorts of reasons to choose books – choosing authors you love and you know all the readers in group might enjoy is of course a great reason. But I think introducing authors who people may not have read before is a great opportunity. I'd never read anything by J.M Coetze before five years ago. I love his work and I'm pretty sure if I'd read flap copy or a review I would not have pursued his novels. Being open-minded seems like the best approach. I talk to book clubs on the phone and I'm always happy when my books are selected, but it's also so interesting to hear what they've just read and what they will be reading next. The order in which they read certain books can certainly influence what they choose to avoid next, or what they are drawn to.

### **Q: What book are you reading now?**

JILL: I'm reading *Bridge of Sigh* at the moment. I love Richard Russo's work. He's an amazing writer with a real gift of writing great characters. I love his dialogue, love his humor. I was thrilled that he had such nice things to say about *Ask Again Later*. I think he's just amazing writer. I'm the last person in America to read *Eat, Pray, Love* by Liz Gilbert. But I was waiting for a time when I could read it in one sitting — which I did over Christmas break. I wanted to read it for all sorts of reasons. She was nice enough to blurb my first novel *Girls' Poker Night* while she was in the midst of her divorce. I recall a few of our email exchanges from that time and in hindsight, she's even nicer and more generous than I thought at the time. I sort of marvel that she took the time to read my book and offer a quote when she had so many other things going on.

**Q: If you were stuck on a deserted island and could only bring one book with you to read, what would it be and why?**

JILL: Girl Scout Handbook. Enough said.

**Q: If you could have dinner with three writers (alive or dead) who would they be and why?**

JILL: Are we still on the deserted island at this point? -- Judy Blume, Richard Russo and Hermann Hesse. I'd be curious to know what Hesse would say about *Wifey*. Anyway, it would be a very nice boy-girl-boy-girl seating arrangement. I think I'd be relying heavily on Judy and Rick to carry the conversation. I really hope no one has any allergies to shellfish because the starter is She-Crab soup.

**Q: Gave you ever read anything you're too embarrassed to admit (except in this interview)?**

JILL: I think there's a chance I read *The Rules*. Or maybe I read an article about *The Rules* ... does that count?

**Q: Favorite book when you were a child?**

JILL: There really were so many. I loved *Harriet the Spy*, Judy Blume books, Maurice Sendak. Beatrix Potter, Encyclopedia Brown. I recall that some of the Sendak illustrations were scary to me. The Nutshell Library was always one of my favorites and it's one of the first sets I bought for my daughter..

It's so much fun having a child to read to and with. I love children's literature. We read a lot of Kevin Henkes, Rosemary Wells, E.B White, Roald Dahl. My daughter really likes *Yoko's World of Kindness*, *The Best Loved Doll*, and right now she's really enjoying *The Library Mouse*. She likes the Junie B. series and Ivy & Bean, too. There's also a great series of non-fiction books that we enjoy — how sand is made into glass, how tomatoes are made into ketchup, and trees into paper and so on.

**Q: Favorite first line from a book?**

JILL: It's a tie between: *Twas the night before Christmas* ... and *All happy families are alike but an unhappy family is unhappy after its own fashion*.

**Q: Book that changed your life?**

JILL: It would be too dramatic to claim that. I stumbled upon the *Damian*, *Siddhartha*, *Magister Ludi*, *Gertrude*, *Rosalind* and a few other Hermann Hesse books in my high school library when I was about 14 and it was a typical period of great angst and his books felt like wonderful companions, a spotlight on the interior, and for me this is probably the single greatest compliment I can say about any book. On a much lighter note, I felt the same way about certain books when I was pregnant. It was so nice to have a book to open and it would tell you approximately what you should be expecting to see, hear and feel at this particular time. Why aren't there books like that for every day of your life? They also offered "Tips to the father-to-be" and those were generally suggestions about how a husband should be vacuuming the living room to show his love for you and your unborn baby.

**Q: Words to live by?**

JILL: Happy endings aren't for cowards.