

Q&A: Teri talks about the book

So every fiction writer has to answer this first question— is this autobiographical?

I'm not sure how to answer that so I usually say "No" and then, "Yes."

The "No" part is easy—the story is not about me and does not directly reflect any experiences I have had in my life.

The "Yes" part of that answer means that while it is not factually about me, it all came from my imagination and is an exploration of a lot of themes in my life and my writing. While the characters all have their issues, I identify with each of them and their struggle to integrate their past with the present. This is a long way of saying—I feel the story reflects many of my core beliefs.

Can you elaborate? What is one of these core beliefs?

One of the central beliefs that has defined my adulthood and my writing is that you cannot move forward in your life without integrating and understanding the past. While all the characters in the book are stuck in some way, Cat is self-destructing. As the story unfolds and more of her past is revealed, we begin to understand the magnitude of what happened to her and how hard it is for her to confront it. But, it is also getting harder for her to avoid it. The stakes are high.

Do you think this happens in real life?

I think addiction has a lot to do with managing trauma. While you can try to stop drinking or doing drugs, I don't think you can do it successfully without exploring what it is you are protecting yourself from. But you don't have to be an addict to be protecting yourself from trauma, many people "reinvent" themselves. They decide they came from a different background, or move far away from their birthplace or family or have rage issues. We don't think our unhappiness is about the past, we think it is about the guy in the car in front of us who won't make the left before the light turns, but it's not. A fiction writer has the freedom to turn the volume up as high they want to, but I believe we all feel the past bearing down on us and affecting our lives every day.

But aren't there are things that happen that are better forgotten?

If I believed it was possible to truly forget then I would say yes. but just because no one talks about what happened in Cat's family doesn't mean they forget. When you cannot integrate the past into your life, it becomes a secret you don't tell and I believe secrets have more power to destroy than the truth. So, while there are many things that happen to people that are heartbreaking and devastating, it is not possible to simply forget them. Remember denying is not forgetting.

Dealing with the past and integrating trauma is difficult. Why do it?

This is going to sound corny but you do it for love. To feel love and give love. Accepting what happened to you is part of learning to love yourself and when you love yourself you can change the world. See I told you it was going to sound corny.

So does Cat realize this?

Hmmmm....I don't know, does she? You tell me.

What was the hardest part of writing the book?

Finishing it. It took me over ten years to finish it. I didn't work on it the whole time, I had periods where I struggled with the story and put it away but I never, ever lost Cat's voice in my head.

When I finally finished it. I knew I was done when I stopped hearing her. She had been a constant companion for many years. I was surprised at the loss I felt when the book was done. I spoke to a few other writers and they told me this is common. It feels like a good friend has moved away. I get to visit her, but I still miss the closeness.

What was the easiest part of writing the book?

Taking breaks for snacks.