

Discussion Topics for *Tristan's Gap*

While *Tristan's Gap* touches issues a lot of us struggle with, it is first and foremost, I hope, a piece of literature and therefore a work of art. Otherwise, reading it would be like watching your child play Mr. Molar in a school play about dental hygiene. So let's start there (with the literary, not the dental).

- One publisher we proposed the novel to suggested that I tell the story from three points of view – Serena's, Nick's, and Tristan's. I said no (and so did the publisher.) Do you think I made the right choice?
- While the book does have a plot that I hope kept you turning the pages long after you should have turned out the light, it is, like most of my books, character-driven. Were the characters real to you? Who did you relate to best (if anyone!)?
- Including poetry was a real stretch for me. At least I only had to mimic bad teenage poetry – emphasis on the “bad”! Did it work for you as a way to see into the soul of a character you didn't have an opportunity to spend much time with otherwise?
- I fell in love with Bethany Beach when I was there doing research (including those amazing Boardwalk Fries; my daughter said, “If these were sin, we'd all be going to–“ Well, you get the idea). Could you see it? Could the story have taken place anywhere else?
- I really try to steer away from sentimentality and allow my characters to feel deep emotion so that my readers will, too. Did you?

When people asked me, during the writing of *Tristan's Gap*, “What is your book about?”, I always answered with, “How much time do you have?” Because the novel really is “about” a number of things, just as our lives are every minute. I've come up with five, but feel free to delve into others if you experienced them.

- **Parenting**
 - I met a number of teenage girls, raised in solid Christian homes, who confided to me that they felt oppressed. When one girl said to me, “I feel like I'm going to go from the authority of my father to the authority of my husband. I know it's wrong to think this, but I don't want that, ” I wanted to rip her father's nose hairs out with red hot tweezers. Instead, I wrote this book. Do you want to comment on that?
 - If Serena were to lead a Mentoring Moms group now, how would it be different from the approach she took at the beginning of the story?

- Which style of mothering depicted in the book is most like yours, or most like the way you were raised? Serena in the beginning? Rebekah? Hazel? Mrs. Zabriskie? Serena in the end? None of the above?
 - I got a lot of “Nick is a jerk” type feedback. What’s your take on his fathering style? Do you think he’ll change? What is telling about his first words to Serena in the hospital: “We have our little girl back”?
 - Serena comes to the realization that “Who you are is what you really give your kids.” Care to discuss that?
- **Views of God**
 - There may be as many different views of God as there are people, and I tried to show several in depth. What was Serena’s as the story began? How did it change in the course of her journey?
 - What was Tristan’s view of God before she disappeared? How did it transform through her experience?
 - Whose Godly counsel resonated with you? Pastor Gary’s? Reverend Kate’s? Aunt Pete’s?
 - How did you feel about Rebekah, Peg, and Lissa’s handling of Serena’s rage against God?
 - Nick never verbalized his, but what do you think it was?
 - I was pretty hard on, “God is good all the time. All the time God is good.” Please don’t misunderstand: I do believe that. What I was trying to get across in the book is that there are times when it isn’t the best possible thing to say to someone. What do you think? Does Serena’s version on p. 329 work for you?
 - The characters talk in various places about “the big picture.” Do you agree with the conclusion Serena draws about that on p. 329?

Bridging the Gap

- “Pray that God will bridge the gap between what she needs and what you can give her,” is the best advice I ever received as a mother. Fortunately, it came to me when my daughter was very young. Are there ways that has worked or could work for you as a parent – or the observer of parents?
 - Serena used that advice for more than just her concern for Tristan. Have you taken it beyond parenting? Could you?
- **Christian Marriage**
 - It’s never overtly stated, but which Bible verse do you think Nick, and consequently Serena, used as the basis for their marriage? Did they use it, or abuse it?
 - How did you feel about Serena’s toe-to-toe with Nick at the hospital? Some of my readers applauded it. Some questioned it. Where do you fall?

- Serena told Nick that finding Tristan was a journey she had to make alone. Do you agree with her? Are there such times, even in a well-balanced marriage?
- How do you think Nick and Serena are going to fare now? How possible is it for a relationship like that to change?
- **Being Who You Are**
 - If you've read any of my other books, including the ones for kids, you knew we'd get to this place. After all, they are ALL about discovering who you really are in God's eyes, and being that no matter what. How is this book about that?
 - In my view, LIFE is about that. Do you agree?
 - Which characters in the book are most true to themselves? Did you like them more than others?
 - Which events in the story brought Serena close to her true self?
 - What about in your own journey toward authenticity?