

Discussion Guide for *Ollie Ollie In Come Free: A Memoir of Swallowed Time* by Anne Bernard Becker



- 1) In *Ollie Ollie In Come Free* the author's memories are given a sense of immediacy through the use of the child narrator and present tense. Did this technique awaken your own childhood memories more than a typical adult autobiographical voice would?
- 2) The author's premise is that the deaths of her siblings caused an emotional shut-down in the family. Do you think she made her case, or did you sense that other factors had greater impact than the deaths themselves? What might these other factors be?
- 3) The whole question of memory and how it works has been in the news in recent years. The consensus seems to be that memory is highly subjective and unreliable. As you read the book, what were your reflections on the filters that memories creates? Did you find yourself questioning and analyzing your own childhood memories?
- 4) It is often said that each member of a family has an entirely different childhood experience, different parents, from their siblings. Did you find yourself wondering about this while reading the book, and reflecting on how your own siblings might have had a radically different experience than you did growing up? Did you relate to other characters in the book more than to the author?

5) The author implies that it was the absence of certain things in her grief-stricken family -- expressed affection, connection, safety, mirroring of feelings--that caused her a great deal of anxiety and loneliness. Did you find this sense of what wasn't present as compelling as the more extreme, up-front abuses? Or were you able to relate to this memoir more easily because it was less dramatic, more like your own experience?

6) Was there a lesson could be taken away from the author's's life? What was it?

7) Did your initial opinions of the author change after reading further into her book? If so, did it change for the better or the worse?

8) Was there a specific passage that had left an impression, good or bad? Share the passage and its effect.

9) How did aspects of the book mirror your own experiences with grief--and how did it expand your understanding of the emotion/experience?

10) Would you call the author's childhood "tragic"? Why or why not?

11) Did the book change any notions you have held about how grief affects society as a whole?

12) What is your take on the role religion played in the life of the author?