



CHRISTMAS MOURNING: Book Club Discussion Guide

Margaret Maron on the writing of *Christmas Mourning*: Our area has seen a number of teenage deaths from texting while driving. What if one of those was murder? Add in Christmas and the tragedy is even more heart-rending. As with all my books, *Christmas Mourning* contains elements taken from my family's personal traditions: the pine tree that is fattened up with extra branches, fruitcakes, shooting mistletoe from treetops, baking cookies, etc. And I did give my husband an electric train one year because I'd often heard him speak wistfully of the one he'd had as a child. Every child (and many an adult!) who visits over the holidays wants a turn at blowing the whistle as those cars circle the tree endlessly. Some toys are never outgrown.

DISCUSSION POINTS:

1. What are some of the special ornaments or decorations your own family enjoys?
2. The book opens with the death of a popular cheerleader who was talking on her cell phone at the time she crashed. Would Mallory have been as startled if she had been paying attention and realized she was coming up on a parked truck, or was the crash inevitable when the light blinded her?
3. Deborah's nieces tell her that Mallory had no ego and was genuinely nice. As principal of the high school, Deborah's mother-in-law holds a different viewpoint, as does her sister-in-law Barbara. Which do you think is most accurate?
4. Even though Deborah agrees with MADD's purpose (Mothers Against Drunk Driving), she takes a jaundiced view of the head of the local MADD chapter. Have you ever felt reluctant to join a good cause because of the people running it?
5. Mrs. Alma Wiggins fears that her age (92) would automatically be against her if she were in an accident with someone younger. Is she right?
6. After a year now, Dwight's son Cal seems to be adjusting to his mother's death and Deborah's presence in his life, yet he's almost quit using her name. Why do you suppose this is? Contrast Deborah's situation with that of Matt and Jason Wentworth's stepmother.
7. If Matt had lived, do you think he would have turned out like his brothers? Which is more important: nature or nurture?
8. How do you feel about those spontaneous roadside memorials? Are they a comfort or a painful reminder?
9. Are there stories in your own family similar to the one Kezzie Knott tells his grandchildren about his tangerine Christmas?

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