

(SPOILER ALERT)

Themes and related questions:

Designing our lives and the beauty of second chances

- How often do we step back from our everyday life and take a hard look at things? Should we do it more often? Should we challenge ourselves to make some changes?
 - If you were to suddenly find yourself at an unexpected crossroads in your career, as Renee did at the outset of the book, how would you react? Has something similar ever happened to you? Finding another job as quickly as possible might *appear* to be the safe, sensible route. It would likely be the easiest. If you were in Renee’s shoes, what might you have done?
- Exploring how certain events shape our lives:
 - Renee lost her husband and was suddenly a single parent to two young children. The story picks up ten years after she’s widowed, but we sense she’s spent most of those years providing for her kids, taking little time for herself. She has no love life and few friends outside of work. Her job loss serves as a wake-up call. How does Renee begin to grow and evolve after she’s laid off? How does she deal with the fear of the unknown?
 - Renee’s chance meeting with Susan on the airplane has ripple effects. She’s intrigued by Susan’s personal story and her retreat business eventually evolves out of their meeting. Have you experienced a seemingly random encounter with someone that eventually led to something bigger?
 - Life is all about choices. Renee had to choose whether or not to reach out to her dead husband’s brother, Grant, when he contacted her to help with his critically-ill daughter. Renee knew she was exposing them all to an emotional rollercoaster when she agreed to have her own kids tested. In the end, her actions may well have saved a life but there were no guarantees. Would you have agreed to it? What are some choices you’ve had to make in life that had significant repercussions on someone else?
 - Renee took a number of chances throughout the story. Do you think it was reasonable for her to take a tropical vacation with her kids, shortly after losing her job? Staying home would have been “safer” but her severance package provided her with some cushion. If she hadn’t gone, she’d never have met Matt. What would you have done if you were in Renee’s shoes?

Parenting and Family

- When you were growing up, was there that one, eccentric relative that still holds a special place in your memories? For Renee and her siblings, Celia was that person. How about for you? What made them so special?
- Throughout the story, parents worry about their children. Both of Renee’s kids face external pressures and dangers that threaten their safety and wellbeing. George, despite the fact his kids are adults, still worries over the struggles they face. Do you think parents ever stop worrying about their children?

- While it may have been obvious *who* was stalking Julie throughout the story, how did this mysterious thread add to the plot? How did it pull Matt deeper into Renee’s life? How might it have encapsulated the many different types of dangers parents try to protect their children from these days?

Love and Romance

- Did you expect a love interest to develop between Grant and Renee? Would you have had the same reservations Renee did about allowing that to happen?
- Renee’s chance encounters with Matt were initially contentious. Their relationship evolved over time. How did his profession play into the storyline? If Whispering Pines were to be made into a movie, who would you like to see cast to play Matt?

Importance of Place in our Lives

- Whispering Pines itself plays an integral role in the story. Many of Renee and her family’s most special memories are rooted in that place. For Renee, she’d always associated the lake resort with her aunt, Celia. Now, as adults, Whispering Pines offers a place of calm and rejuvenation, to both guests and family. Do you believe a place can give you that sense of peace and belonging?
- Growing up, did you have a special place like Whispering Pines? Do you wish you could go back, and if you could, do you think it would still feel as magical?

Leaving a Legacy

- Leaving a legacy is an important theme in the Celia’s Gifts series. Each book showcases how Celia’s heirs use their inheritances. But it goes much deeper than the physical things she leaves to them. Celia has left behind an emotional legacy as well. How are some of the ways Celia lived her own life still impacting the lives of her family? Do you give any thought to the kind of legacy you will leave behind?
- Traditions can provide comfort and a sense of continuity to families. Many such holiday traditions are described throughout this book. Which, if any, of their traditions were similar to your own? Do you think traditions continue to be an important part of today’s families? Do you ever feel constrained by tradition?

