



Betty Sweet Tells All

By Judith Minthorn Stacy
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Introduction

It's the hottest June on record, the close-knit Southern town of Poplar Grove is astir with the latest gossip, and everyone seems to be talking about Betty Sweet's daughter, Maggie. She's gone and left Steven, her husband of nineteen years, and Amy and Jill, her twin teenage daughters, and taken a job in the local beauty shop, the Curl & Swirl. And she's reconnected with her old high school sweetheart, Jerry, too.

No one is more shocked by Maggie's behavior than her by-the-book Southern family. Maggie's scorned husband Steven won't pass along her messages to the twins, and he's been spotted around town with a local widow. Amy, about to leave for college, consoles herself with frequent shopping trips to the local mall. Jill throws herself into her wood carving, hoping that her efforts will convince her parents to pay her tuition for classes with Chief Too-Tall, a local master carver. Maggie's beleaguered mother,

Betty Sweet, is in the middle of all of the madness. When the invincible matriarch of the Sweet family, Mama Dean, gives Maggie the silent treatment, voicing her disapproval in a series of heavy-breathing prank phone calls, Betty encourages Maggie to smooth things over with a peace offering of an Impossible pie, but it seems that even that won't do the trick.

Through her correspondence with her best friend Annie, and an unexpected encounter with a new friend, Betty discovers for herself that the course of true love is never smooth. With a little encouragement from Annie and some newfound inner strength, Betty comes to grips with her own happiness and helps Maggie do the same. In its heartwarming and uplifting finale, *Betty Sweet Tells All* proves that even in the most troubled times, true love and family prevail.

Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe Betty Sweet's relationship with her mother, Mama Dean? How would you describe Betty's relationship with her daughter, Maggie? What secrets do Maggie and Betty and Mama Dean keep from one another?
2. Who is Charlie Love? In what context do he and Betty first get to know one another? What superficial differences is Betty aware of in their first encounter?
3. How does Maggie Sweet feel about Jerry Roberts? How do we know? How does Betty Sweet feel about Jerry? What is Jerry Roberts' history with the Sweet family?
4. How do Amy, Jill, and Steven react to Maggie's departure? In what way do their reactions reflect the complement of emotions experienced by families confronting divorce? Did you find yourself sympathizing with the reactions of any of these characters?
5. What role does Betty's friend, Annie, play in the book? How would you characterize their relationship?
6. "All those years I'd thought that if I was a good, decent woman, that if I worried enough, sacrificed enough, everything would turn out right." (page 85) What problems does Betty Sweet have in her family, work, and love life? Were you surprised by anything Betty does in trying to make things right for Maggie?
7. What is Mama Dean's perspective on Maggie's separation from Steven? How does she feel about her great-granddaughter Jill and her wood art?
8. How does Betty Sweet manage to get Steven to sign the divorce papers and agree to put Jill through school with Chief Too-Tall?
9. Who or what was your favorite character or event in *Betty Sweet Tells All*? Were you surprised by the outcome of the book?

About the Author:

Judith Minthorn Stacy is a native of Michigan, and she has resided in Mooreville, North Carolina, since 1987. Stacy married a Southerner right out of high school, had four children, and at various times worked as a salesclerk, waitress, and respiratory therapist. She does not style hair. A humor columnist for several newspapers, she has been published in national women's magazines and regional anthologies. Her first book, *Maggie Sweet*, won the Carolina Novel Award.