



The Way the Crow Flies

By Ann-Marie MacDonald
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Introduction

Life on the move is already the norm for eight-year-old Madeleine McCarthy. Her family's posting to Centralia is just one of many new starts, new homes, and new friends. As the beloved daughter of Jack, an officer of the Royal Canadian Air Force, and beautiful mami Mimi, she is secure in the comforting cocoon of her family love and the optimism that embraced the early sixties. Yet even her adoring family cannot protect Madeleine from the perilous world around them, including the menace of the Cold War, and the unimaginable threat of Mr. March, whose Pied Piper power over his students is a secret burden they must carry.

By the time Madeleine turns nine, her innocent childhood is shattered and a fellow schoolmate is murdered. The father she idolizes is caught up in a web of secrets and must decide where his loyalties lie. And Madeleine must grow up knowing too much and knowing too little. Finally, twenty years later,

Madeleine comes face to face with the truth and the tragedy that changed hers, and many other lives, forever.

Questions for Discussion

1. The book begins "It is possible, in 1962, for a drive to be the highlight of a family week." How does this opening establish the outlook of early sixties, and how does the author illustrate changing times throughout the course of the story?
2. Most of the characters in the story are not what they seem. Discuss the deceptions, innocent or nefarious, of the following characters: Jack, Mimi, Henry Froelick, Oskar Fried, Mr. March, Madeleine, and Ricky and Colleen Froelick.
3. While driving to Centralia, the McCarthys pass a Welcome to Kitchener sign. "Did you know Kitchener used to be called Berlin?" Jack says. "It was settled by the German immigrants, but they changed the name during the First World War" (page 13). How does this scene establish a recurring theme throughout the story?
4. Why does Jack agree to help Simon? Loyalty to his friend? Loyalty to his country? Or does Jack want to recapture the glory that was taken from him the day his flying career was cut short because of the plane accident?
5. Jack calls Simon to ask him to speak to someone in authority to help Ricky. Simon reveals that no one else knows about the operation ... and no one else will. Simon says to Jack "Don't shake hands with the Devil before you meet him" (page 410). Why is this ironic, coming from Simon? Where else is the expression used?
6. White lies and small secrets have a way of snowballing in the story. Jack not telling Mimi about Oskar Fried, one of the first secrets he's ever kept from his wife, leads to many unfortunate events. Discuss the path of destruction behind this, and other secrets in the story.
7. Why does Mimi have such an adverse reaction to Karen Froelich from the moment she first meets her?
8. Mimi often tells the children to "think nice thoughts" whenever any serious discussion comes up. What does this do to Madeleine's coping skills?
9. Despite surviving such hard times as the Depression and World War II, Mimi and Jack and the rest of their generation try to raise their families on pure optimism. Why, and in what ways, does Madeleine resent this as an adult?
10. What was Simon's motivation for sending Mimi the letter after Jack died?
11. What does Madeleine smell when she sniffs her hands? What does the odor represent?
12. Many chapters open with brief passages and excerpts separate from the main story. Why do you think the author uses this narrative technique?
13. Discuss the real and imagined guilt that burden Madeleine and Jack.

About the Author

Novelist and dramatist Ann-Marie MacDonald is the author of the international bestselling and award winning novel, *Fall on Your Knees*. She also won the Governor General's Award for Drama and the Canadian Author's Award for Fiction. She lives in Toronto.