



Traveling Light

By Katrina Kittle
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Introduction

"Travel light and you can sing in the robber's face" was the best advice Summer Zwolenick ever received from her father, though she didn't recognize it at the time. Three years after the accident that ended her career as a ballerina, she is back in the familiar suburbs of Dayton, Ohio, teaching at a local high school. But it wasn't nostalgia that called Summer home. It was her need to spend quality time with her brother, Todd, and his devoted partner, Jacob. Todd, the golden athlete whose strength and spirit encouraged Summer to nurture her own unique talents and follow her dream, is in the final stages of a terminal illness. In a few short months, he will be dead—leaving Summer only a handful of precious days to learn all the lessons her brother still has to teach her . . . from how to love and how to live to how to let go.

Traveling Light is the deeply moving debut novel from Katrina Kittle, the acclaimed author of *The Kindness of Strangers*—an unforgettable story of love, bonds, and promises that endure longer than life itself.

Questions for Discussion

1. What does the title mean? When Todd places "Travel light" on his list of things to do, what does he mean?
2. Which characters succeed in traveling light? How does the success or failure to "travel light" affect Abby? Grandma Anna? Denny? Zack? The parents? Nicholas? Summer? Todd? Jacob?
3. How does the manner in which Todd contracts HIV tie into the theme of traveling light?
4. Does Summer keep her promise to her brother? Does she change her view of what a successful keeping of that promise entails?
5. Compare and contrast the relationship of Summer and Nicholas to that of Jacob and Todd. How does the parents' relationship compare? What about Abby and Brad's relationship?
6. Compare and contrast Summer's feelings and attitudes about dance and teaching. Do those feelings and attitudes change over the course of the novel?
7. Todd sends Summer a postcard saying "Be kind for everyone we meet is fighting a hard battle," referring to Grandma Anna. What is Grandma Anna's battle? How does Summer's growing understanding of Grandma Anna's battle parallel her own understanding of Denny Robillard? What is Denny's battle? What is Summer's battle in dealing with Denny?
8. What is the responsibility of a teacher to teach tolerance in public schools? Is Summer a good teacher? Is she out of line with what she tries to accomplish with Denny? With Zack?
9. What is the significance of Chaos, the mare? What does Summer learn, or gain, from her?
10. What is the definition of family? What sense of family do the various characters in *Traveling Light* possess? Relationships to consider: Amicia with Todd and Jacob; Jacob and Todd versus Jacob's parents; Summer and Todd versus their parents; Todd and Grandma Anna; Aunt Marnee with everyone.

At one point, Jacob refers to Amicia as "family." Do you agree? Jacob's loyalties to his family unit with Todd are stronger than those to his own parents. Summer and Todd, however, remain close to their parents, even though their parents have failed them in many ways. Where do relatives like Grandma Anna, or Aunt Marnee, tie into your definition? Did you sympathize with Todd's mother, having to live with Anna, knowing how Anna felt about Todd?

11. Todd sends Nicholas the Rilke quote, "For one human being to love another; that is perhaps the most difficult of all our tasks, the ultimate, the last test and proof, the work for which all other work is but a preparation." What do you think? Is there more difficult work that any character faces in this novel? Is Todd facing death a more difficult task?
12. What is the significance of the closing line of the novel?
13. How did you feel about AIDS before you began reading this book? How do you feel after reading it? Did any of your own views change? Which do you think would be a more difficult struggle—the physical pain and illness, or the social stigma still attached to AIDS?

About the Author

Katrina Kittle is the author of *Two Truths and a Lie* and *The Kindness of Strangers*. She lives in Dayton, Ohio, where she teaches English

and theatre at the Miami Valley School.