



Skinny

By Diana Spechler
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Introduction

Gray Lachmann is 26 years old, lives in Brooklyn with her boyfriend, Mikey, a comedian on the rise, and runs her own successful comedy booking business. But she's unable to come to terms with the recent death of her father—a man who had grown increasingly Orthodox in his Judaism in the years before he died, and from whom she was estranged because Mikey isn't Jewish. In her search for answers, she takes a job as a counselor at Camp Carolina, a weight-loss camp of dubious credentials in North Carolina. There, she is surrounded by a compelling cast of characters: her devious co-counselor, Sheena; the self-aggrandizing camp director, Lewis; the hot assistant director, Bennett; and an assorted group of campers who thwart every attempt at control—including Eden, her newly discovered 16-year-old half-sister.

While at the camp, Gray covertly tries to understand who her father was by getting closer to Eden. At the same time, she must face truths about both her emotional and physical self in order to finally find peace with her father and her own inner demons. Visceral, poignant and often funny, through taught and gorgeous prose, Spechler brings to light the lies we often hide behind and how they can keep us from seeing the beauty beneath the surface of those around us and even ourselves.

Questions for Discussion

1. *Skinny* explores the relationship between food and emotions. What is the connection between hunger and longing? Why do you think Gray immediately turned to food after her father's death?
2. Childhood obesity, a hot-button issue in American politics, is rapidly becoming a global concern. What are some pros and cons of weight-loss camps for kids? Who is responsible for a child's health?
3. To what degree, if any, is Gray responsible for her father's death?
4. Gray tries to replace her father with Mikey, and Mikey with Bennett. What is the allure and what is the danger of "replacing" important people in our lives?
5. While reading *Skinny*, did you ever feel like telling Gray (or other characters) to stop behaving the way she was (or they were) behaving? What advice would you have liked to give?
6. Lewis, although his heart is arguably in the right place, consistently uses poor judgment. How could he have better handled some of the problems that arose at Camp Carolina?
7. *Skinny* deals as much with male eating disorders (Gray's father's, for example), as with female eating disorders. What pressures do men face when it comes to their bodies? Are body-image issues worse for one gender?
8. Gray makes a few observations of her mother's eating habits. How do you think those habits influenced Gray? Generally, how do you think parents' relationships with food affect their children?
9. Gray has a tough time emotionally connecting with her campers. Why do you think this is? How did the camp cliques keep some of the teens from making progress?
10. Throughout the novel, Gray writes highly emotional letters to "Fat People." What do her letters say about her relationship with her own body? What do you make of "fat discrimination"? Does it ever happen in reverse (overweight people discriminating against thin people)?

About the Author

Diana Spechler is the author of *Who By Fire* (Harper Perennial, September 2008). She received her MFA degree from the University of Montana, and was a Steinbeck Fellow at San Jose State University from 2004-2005. Her fiction has appeared in *Glimmer Train Stories*, *Moment*, *Lilith*, and elsewhere. She lives in New York City.