



BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION GUIDE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 The novel opens with Cassidy experiencing a miscarriage. We don't know much about Cassidy yet, but discuss how her reaction to being told her baby is lost informs who she is as a character. How might different types of women react to this news?
- 2 Cassidy and her mother, Joan, often butt heads. Both of them are convinced it's because they are so different from each other, but what do you think? Maybe they are more alike than they care to admit.
- 3 Cassidy doesn't understand how one in four women have had a miscarriage yet she's never met another woman who's had one . . . unless she has. Why do you think miscarriage is something women don't feel they can talk about, even with each other? In your experience, what stigmas and "shames" are associated with pregnancy loss?
- 4 Claire tells Cassidy that it's normal to be scared about motherhood and that she'll be scared forever. What do you think she means by this? Is this true in your own experience?
- 5 Cassidy shares her loss on Instagram to mixed reviews. Some famous celebrities have made the news by coming forward and sharing their own losses in the media. They have faced similar reactions, a mixture of backlash and support. What do you think? Should more women share their stories openly, or is this something better discussed in private?
- 6 Common wisdom suggests that women wait until after the first trimester to share a positive pregnancy announcement. Women who've had miscarriages often disregard this advice. What are your thoughts?
- 7 There are many instances in the novel where a character's intentions differ from their actions. Joan is a prime example of this. She often thinks she is being helpful and supportive but is perceived much differently. Talk about this. If this intent is pure but the delivery is flawed, is it fair for Cassidy to react in the ways she does?
- 8 Cassidy sometimes compares her own pain to that of others and admits that she's ashamed that it makes her feel better. Why do you think humans do this?
- 9 There are four points of view in the story. Discuss how the other characters help you better understand Cassidy and the story as a whole. Do you have a favorite character? Whom do you relate to the most and why?
- 10 Discuss the title of the novel. Each character has a unique perspective on what we carry as a person, mother, father, husband. What do you think the significance of the title is?



Kalyn Fogarty grew up on a horse farm in rural Massachusetts. When she's not writing, she's riding and training horses at Artemis Training and Sales, a showjumping farm in New York. She lives on the south shore of Long Island with her husband, two young daughters, and German Shepherd rescue, Layla.



kalynfogarty.com



[Kalyn-Fogarty-Author](https://www.facebook.com/Kalyn-Fogarty-Author)



[@Kalyn117](https://twitter.com/Kalyn117)



[@KFogartyAuthor](https://www.instagram.com/KFogartyAuthor)

Q&A WITH KALYN:

Q: *What We Carry* deals with the difficult topic of miscarriage. Why did you choose this specific trauma as the inciting incident of the novel?

A: In 2017 I miscarried my first pregnancy at 17 weeks. By this point in my pregnancy I had already found out the sex of my baby and was considered in the “safe zone” by my doctors and common wisdom. I’d begun decorating the nursery and filling out my registry. Although I understood that women could miscarry this late into pregnancy, I had no personal experience with it and honestly believed it would never happen to me. My pregnancy up until that point had been relatively easy and uncomplicated...until it wasn’t.

After my miscarriage I poured over the grief forums and grasped at straws to try and explain why this happened to me. During that time, I tried to find solace in one of my favorite places--fiction--but found the topic was rarely talked about, aside from peripherally. My miscarriage was my secret obsession, something I thought about everyday but rarely talked about. This inspired me to find other women with similar experiences. Once I began sharing my own story I found so many women--family, friends, strangers (who became friends)--who were eager to share their own stories of loss. All of these conversations shaped the character of Cassidy.

This was the beginning of *What We Carry*. In October 2018, just over a year after my miscarriage, I gave birth to my rainbow baby. I wrote the first draft of the novel in the months following her birth. I revised and edited the novel while pregnant with my second daughter, born in August of 2020. Now it is out in the world a year later!

Q: Is the current title, *What We Carry*, the title you started with?

A: My working title was *After the Storm*. A baby born after a miscarriage is called a rainbow baby. The expression “after every storm there is a rainbow” became a mantra to me in the months following my miscarriage and into the scary first weeks of my subsequent pregnancy. We changed the title to *What We Carry* after a later draft and I fell in love with the new title. This encompasses everything the novel is about and I loved how it made reference to what *WE* carry--since this story is more than just the story of one character.

Q: *What We Carry* is told in multiple first person POV with Cassidy, Owen, Joan and Claire narrating alternate chapters. Why did you chose to tell the story in this way?

A: Actually, the first draft of *What We Carry* was told in close third person POV. I wrote the entire novel in this voice before deciding to change to first person POV with alternating chapters. My original idea for the story was to make it an “everywoman” story. I worried that narrating the story through the lens of one woman’s specific experience might not be as universal as I hoped. I wanted the story to be relatable to all women, no matter their journey. After finishing this draft, I realized that this type of story needed to be told in an even closer point of view since it is such a deeply personal trauma. The third POV was still too much distance between the reader and narrator.

I considered telling the entire story in Cassidy’s voice but that didn’t feel right either. Like I learned from my own experience and talking to others, a miscarriage does not happen to just one person. I knew I wanted to include the husband’s voice, that was an easy decision. I added Joan and Claire to round out the perspectives. Cassidy’s journey to motherhood is wrought with lots of obstacles- the miscarriage is just one of them. Her relationship to her own mother was a key part of this. Claire rounded out the characters--another example of motherhood and how the experience is different for everyone.

Q: In the novel Cassidy is an equine veterinarian. Is there a reason for this career choice?

A: When I’m not writing, I am running my horseback riding business, Artemis Training and Sales. I am a professional equestrian who trains horses and riders who compete on the hunter and jumper show circuit. I began riding when I was two and have been in love with horses ever since.

I majored in biology and biochemistry in college and intended on pursuing veterinary medicine. I worked at a few hospitals and even got accepted into veterinary school but ultimately deferred and decided to change course and follow my heart, which lead me to open my own training business. Even though I didn’t go to veterinary school, working with horses day in and day out for 30+ years has taught me a lot about the animal and my curiosity regarding the medical side of things never stopped. I was very excited to do some research on equine reproduction for this novel and hope readers enjoy the references.

Cassidy’s own love of horses and animals is a reflection of my own. After my miscarriage I found so much comfort in being with these animals who have brought me so much joy that I knew I needed to add that to the story. I hope that other women can relate- even if it’s not horses specifically, I think we all take comfort in the familiar.

Q: *What We Carry* is told in multiple first person POV with Cassidy, Owen, Joan and Claire narrating alternate chapters. Why did you chose to tell the story in this way?

A: Actually, the first draft of *What We Carry* was told in close third person POV. I wrote the entire novel in this voice before deciding to change to first person POV with alternating chapters. My original idea for the story was to make it an “everywoman” story. I worried that narrating the story through the lens of one woman’s specific experience might not be as universal as I hoped. I wanted the story to be relatable to all women, no matter their journey. After finishing this draft, I realized that this type of story needed to be told in an even closer point of view since it is such a deeply personal trauma. The third POV was still too much distance between the reader and narrator.

I considered telling the entire story in Cassidy’s voice but that didn’t feel right either. Like I learned from my own experience and talking to others, a miscarriage does not happen to just one person. I knew I wanted to include the husband’s voice, that was an easy decision. I added Joan and Claire to round out the perspectives. Cassidy’s journey to motherhood is wrought with lots of obstacles- the miscarriage is just one of them. Her relationship to her own mother was a key part of this. Claire rounded out the characters--another example of motherhood and how the experience is different for everyone.

Q: Did you always know you wanted to be a writer?

A: When I was in elementary school I wrote and illustrated a series of books featuring horses who kept humans as pets. In this series, the horses talked, wore clothes, had jobs...and humans were their pets and entertainment. Strange, I know. But I think my mother still has them somewhere.

I tried my hand at another series while in high school and college. This one centered around a group of elite horseback riders. Think *Pretty Little Liars* meets the *Saddle Club*. I wrote a few books in the series but never did anything with them. They were fun to write and it was about a topic I knew well.

What We Carry is actually the fourth full length adult novel I’ve written. I hope to go back and get the other few edited and who knows, maybe you will get to read those one day!

So, long story short...yes, I have always wanted to be a writer. It took me a little time to find my voice and discover what I wanted to write about (not only horses, although I’ll throw them in here and there, I can’t help myself).

Q: Now for some non-book related questions! What is your biggest fear?

A: Water. I'm embarrassed to admit I can't swim, despite growing up near the ocean in Massachusetts and now residing on Long Island (about three blocks from the water). I don't like water or getting wet. I'm a land animal.

Q: Are you a cat person or a dog person?

A: Does horse person count? I'm that crazy horse girl from school that everyone knows. Yes, that one. The one who read a lot of horse books and pretended to gallop around the playground on a pretend horse. I've never really grown out of that. But I love all animals. I would say I'm more of a large dog person or a fat cat person. I don't trust skinny kitties or dogs I can carry around.

Q: Favorite books and authors?

A: Children's book: *Fritz and the Beautiful Horses* by Jan Brett. It was written about my pony Fritzy, so maybe I'm partial.

Series: The Dark Tower Series by Stephen King. He's a genius and I'd read his grocery list if it was made public.

Authors: Jodi Picoult and Anita Shreve inspired me to start exploring difficult topics in women's fiction. They both write so beautifully and tackle issues relevant to our lives in interesting and engaging ways. I love how they tell stories about ordinary women doing extraordinary things.

Adult book: *She's Come Undone* by Wally Lamb. I'm not sure what it is about this book that lingers so I've read it over and over. I think this is why I love it--I'm not precisely sure why. So I read it again to find out.

MISCARRIAGE RESOURCES:

If you or a loved one has experienced a miscarriage, Kalyn recommends the following resources for support, guidance, and healing:

[Undefining Motherhood](#)

[The Bump: Pregnancy Loss and Miscarriage](#)

Jessica Zucker, Ph.D, [@IHadAMiscarriage](#)

[The Miscarriage Association](#)

[What to Expect When You're Expecting: Pregnancy Loss](#)

[The Worst Girl Gang Ever Podcast](#)