



The Summer Kitchen
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Summary

SandraKaye Darden has much to deal with. Her physician-husband has been distracted and seldom comes home. Her son Christopher is growing away from her. She hasn't heard from Jake, her adopted son, who left without a word. Added to this, the recent murder of her Uncle, Poppy, has left her disoriented. When SandraKaye returns to Poppy's house to prepare it to be sold, she is haunted by the many happy childhood memories it holds for her. SandraKaye then sees some children searching for food in a nearby dumpster and shoos them away. She decides to make sandwiches and returns the next day, and the next.

Twelve-year-old Cass Blue and her brother, Rusty, run away from home after their mother's death and find a home in a run-down Dallas neighborhood. One day a woman shows up with some free sandwiches and Cass dares to hope that life will get better.

SandraKaye and Cass become two unlikely friends who somehow manage to help each other during a time of crisis in their lives and bring a whole neighborhood together in starting a neighborhood soup kitchen.

Themes:

Family life
Bereavement
Hunger
Homelessness
Runaway

Questions for Discussion

Chapter 1 SandraKaye

Having to clean out and sell Poppy's house was agonizing for SandraKaye because it was a place that held so many nurturing childhood and adult memories for her. How do some of the good and bad memories from a home help to shape us as adults?

Chapter 2 Cass

Cass took "mind trips" and spent a good deal of time reading to fill in the time she spent alone and to take her mind off of her desperate and lonely situation. How did the memories of her mother help her get through some of the tough times?

Chapter 3 SandraKaye

SandraKaye's perfect life was disrupted by Poppy's sudden death and Jake's disappearance. Why was SandraKaye now drawn to Poppy's house? What did she find there?

SandraKaye could have ignored the children in the dumpster. Why did she stop and chase them away?

Chapter 4 Cass

How did Cass feel about Kiki moving in, taking over her bedroom and leaving a child for Cass to take care of?

Chapter 5 SandraKaye

Focusing on fixing up Poppy's house took SandraKaye's mind off missing Jake and Poppy. Why did SandraKaye feel guilty about sneaking away to Poppy's house and why did she lie to her best friend, Holly, about going there?

Chapter 6 Cass

Even though Cass resents having Kiki in her home, why do you think she is glad that Opal is there? Why does she take over caring for Opal in such a possessive way?

Chapter 7 SandraKaye

How did SandraKaye react when she brought sandwiches for the children who were sifting through the dumpster and was confronted by three menacing teen-age boys?

Compare the dumpster diving Vegans who hunted for food to the children living in the apartment complex who also searched for food in the dumpsters.

Chapter 8 Cass

Even though Cass was hungry, she showed maturity in sharing the sandwiches with the neighbor children. What were her thoughts about sharing, even though she had so little?

Why was MJ's bookstore so important to Cass?

Chapter 9 SandraKaye

How were SandraKaye and Rob's reactions to Christopher's car accident the same? How were their reactions different? What effect did Jake's disappearance and Poppy's death have on how they dealt with problems, like the car accident?

Chapter 10 Cass

Cass's mother often told her not to give up on her dreams and to count her blessings. How did this help Cass as she tried to encourage Rusty when he became depressed about their financial situation? Why did she feel that there were angels all around her as she was falling asleep?

Chapter 11 SandraKaye

Why was Christopher driven to be perfect and to try and please his father? How did Christopher feel about his father's concern for him?

Chapter 12 Cass

What drew Cass to Red Bird Street to wait for the "Sandwich Lady?" Did she make small talk with SandraKaye only because she wanted the sandwiches?

Chapter 13 SandraKaye

SandraKaye tried to create a perfect home life and be perfect wife and mother. In what ways was she compensating for her own childhood? Could she have been doing harm to her children by not letting them experience some of the natural suffering that goes along with experiencing life?

Discuss what SandraKaye meant when she said, *"It never occurred to me, while I was rallying to help those less fortunate, that fortunes can turn at any time and only then do you find out what you're made of, what's beneath the surface."*

Chapter 14 Cass

How did Cass react when Kiki's boyfriend came to the apartment? Why was she so concerned for Opal?

Chapter 15 SandraKaye

SandraKaye was driving across town every day to renovate a house no one cared about and to have tea parties with two little girls she barely knew. How does she explain this to Holly, Rob and Christopher?

Cass lied to SandraKaye about her age, her mother and much more. Why was it so important for each of them to keep secrets?

Chapter 16 Cass

Cass tried to convince Rusty that it was time to leave and begin again in a new place because she was afraid that SandraKaye might call Child Protective Services. But she had become so attached to Opal that she could not see herself leaving without Opal. What might happen if Rusty and Cass left with Opal?

Chapter 17 SandraKaye

When Christopher was in the hospital for a drug overdose, how did SandraKaye finally show courage and confront Rob about his treatment of Jake and Christopher? Why did SandraKaye finally decide to take Christopher to Poppy's house and let him in on her secret project?

Chapter 18 Cass

What are some of the reasons that Cass went to MJ's Book Basket? Do you think anyone in the story can be compared to Grandfather Fish?

Chapter 19 SandraKaye

Why do you think Holly fell so easily into running the food kitchen and even wanted to expand it? How did a series of events result in SandraKaye reuniting with her childhood friend, Jاليا?

Chapter 20 Cass

MJ told Cass that "What you expect, you create." Cass's expectations were that anything good doesn't last. Does that happen because she expects it or because that it is what she has experienced in her life?

Chapter 21 SandraKaye

SandraKaye finally decided that it was time for her and Christopher to stop pretending and to talk to Rob about what they really wanted. How did Rob react? How does Rob's new job offer and the news that someone has bought Poppy's house impact SandraKaye?

Chapter 22 Cass

When Uncle Len stormed the apartment looking for Kiki and Opal, Cass escaped with Opal. Why do you think Kiki gave Cass her shoes? What did she expect Cass to do? Why was Cass thinking of the song, *Wildfire*?

Chapter 23 SandraKaye

Why do you think SandraKaye wanted Rob to be with her when she went looking for Cass and Opal?

Chapter 24 Cass

Even though Cass's mother was gone, she felt her mother's love and strength helping her as she ran to escape Uncle Len. Cass had the good fortune to have a mother's love that SandraKaye never experienced. How did each of their mothers shape their outlook on life?

Chapter 25 SandraKaye

SandraKaye said, "*Nothing really happens by accident. There is a plan, even when we don't see it, even when it's nothing we would have guessed. There is a purpose for broken houses and broken people.*" Do you think that the choices people make always determined what happens to them? Do you think that sometimes people are victims of their circumstances? Were the hardships Cass endured part of a plan to lead her to a better place?

Short Answer Questions

1. From what country did SandraKaye and Rob adopt Jake?
2. How was Poppy related to SandraKaye?
3. What color was Poppy's house?
4. How old is SandraKaye?
5. What is the name of SandraKaye's childhood friend who lived near Poppy?
6. What song does Cass mention as one that relates to her life?
7. How old is Rusty?
8. Who told Cass that "If the mountain's big, you gotta dream bigger"?
9. Why did Jake run away to Guatamala?
10. Who is Bobo?
11. What musical instrument does Christopher play?
12. What kind of work does Rusty do?
13. Where does Holly live?
14. What did Rusty and Cass buy for Opal at WalMart?
15. Who is Maryanne?
16. What did Teddy like to do?
17. Where was the summer kitchen located?
18. Who are Angel, Boo and Ronnie
19. Where did Cass and Opal hide from Kiki's violent boyfriend?
20. Who finally adopted Opal?
21. Why did Jake return to Guatamala?
22. What does Chris reveal that he wants to study in college?
23. What is MJ's real name?
24. What kind of doll does Opal have?
25. What gift did Cass and Rusty give to SandraKaye?

Answers

1. Guatemala
2. Poppy was SandraKaye's great uncle.
3. Pink
4. Forty-nine
5. Jاليا
6. *Wildfire*
7. Seventeen
8. Her mother
9. To search for his birth parents
10. Jake's border collie
11. Saxophone
12. Construction
13. Across the street
14. Pink shoes
15. SandraKaye's sister
16. Flower gardening

17. Behind Poppy's house
18. Children who lived in an apartment near Cass that she shared the sandwiches with
19. The summer kitchen in Poppy's backyard
20. Holly
21. To become a teacher in his beloved birth country
22. Music
23. Marley Jalicia
24. A Raggedy Ann doll
25. A wooden sign that said, "Summer Kitchen"

RESOURCES

Websites for teen service project ideas:

<http://www.dosomething.org/>

DoSomething.org believes you have the power to make a difference. It is our aim to inspire, support and celebrate a generation of doers: people who see the need to do something, believe in their ability to get it done, and then take action. At DoSomething.org we provide the tools and resources for you to convert your ideas and energy into positive action. Be part of a generation of doers.

<http://www.vfp.org/teenCamp.html>

Volunteers For Peace: founded in 1982, is a Vermont non-profit membership organization that offers opportunities to volunteer abroad in over 3000 projects in more than 100 countries worldwide including the USA.

<http://www.servicelearning.org/resources-kids-and-teens>

The **National Service-Learning Clearinghouse** is a program of Learn and Serve America and the Corporation for National and Community Service. It's easy to get involved. Look around this webpage for project ideas. Talk to your parents, teachers, and friends. Join a youth service organization or club. Participate in a community service day. Learn about Learn and Serve America's funded projects. Find information on Awards or Scholarships.

Local websites for organizations that help the homeless and runaways:

<http://www.heartoftexashomeless.org>

Heart of Texas Homeless Coalition: The HOT Homeless Coalition was formed for charitable and educational purposes relating to the promotion, support, development, and furtherance of rehabilitation services, resources and treatment programs for persons who are homeless in the Heart of Texas Region of the State of Texas.

<http://www.centraltexasyouthservices.org>

Central Texas Youth Services, shelter and services for runaways and kids thinking about running away. 1-800-421-TEEN (8336). Assists in educating kids about the national SafePlace program through the National Runaway Switchboard: 1.800.RUNAWAY.

Websites of organizations that help homeless and street kids:

<http://www.standupforkids.org>

The mission of STANDUP FOR KIDS is to help homeless and street kids.

<http://www.nationalhomeless.org>

<http://www.saferchild.org/homeless.htm>

Safer Child's mission is dedicated to providing parents, caregivers and educators worldwide with the resources and information they need in order to help all children grow up healthy, safe and happy.

<http://www.familyhomelessness.org/>

National Center on Family Homelessness

<http://www.covenanthouse.org>

Covenant House cares for thousands of homeless and runaway kids who might otherwise weather a dangerous night alone on the streets.