



Summary

Gretchen Staebler promises to spend one year in her childhood home caring for her stubborn ninety-six-year-old mother—sort of a middle-aged gap year. Then her mother will move to assisted living, and she will return to her own life, their relationship magically having become all she ever longed it to be. Can it be that easy?

Questions

1. What does the title, “Mother Lode,” foretell of this story?
2. Why do you think the author offered to live with her mother in spite of dreading it? Can you imagine doing something similar?
3. The author shares scenes that could make her come off as a “mean daughter,” or that reflect a less-than-rosy picture of her relationship with her mother. How is this tension essential to the story?
4. What scenes stick with you? What about them are you still thinking about?
5. Food and the kitchen are themes throughout the memoir. Why do you think they were so important to the author’s mother? How do you think they related to the author’s childhood in the 50s and 60s, and to her relationship with her mother? What are/were the themes in your own parent/child relationship?
6. The author’s mother felt guilty that she hadn’t better understood her own mother’s elder years. The author says she may feel sad she couldn’t do better, but she “doesn’t do guilt.” What do you think is the distinction between regret and guilt?
7. What understanding of her mother’s life and aging did the author come to?
8. How did you feel about the author’s and her sisters’ struggle to finally to move their mother to assisted living?
9. The memoir was written as the author lived the story rather than waiting until it was over and could be reflected on, eschewing memoir protocol. How does the epilogue inform how the author will reflect on the years spent with her mother?
10. How did your empathy for the author and for her mother change as you read? Did you identify with one or the other? With their struggle? Did your opinion of the characters change as you read the book? How?

Discussion Guide



Caregivers and Caregiving

11. How did you see the author's childhood home as a character in the story? What are your emotional connections to "home"?

The Topic

1. Is it unfair (or unkind) to publish thoughts about a parent losing their faculties? Does it serve a larger purpose? And does that justify it?
2. How did this book prompt you to think about the last third of life for your own loved one(s)? For yourself?
3. Did reading *Mother Lode* give you ideas about what your response to providing care to someone would be (or is, or was)? Who might provide care for you, and what are your expectations or hopes?
4. If you have siblings, who is the caregiver "type" and how would others engage, or not? If you are an "only," what role did you play as parents aged? How do you think potential family caregiving could affect your family system?
5. How has reading *Mother Lode* affected your sense of empathy for the elderly? For family caregivers?
6. The author was frustrated with the way America cares (or doesn't care) for the elderly in this country. What are your hopes (or dreams) for the medical system and housing options in your own elder years?
7. What is the call to action? What can individuals do to create change in how we treat the elders of our society?