



# JULIA BRYAN THOMAS

"Readers will never forget the children of Guernsey...captivating and complex."

—KELLY MUSTIAN,  
*USA Today* bestselling author  
of *The Girls in the Stilt House*

# *for* THOSE *who are* LOST

A NOVEL



# READING GROUP GUIDE

1. The children's evacuation from Guernsey really happened. If you were one of the Guernsey parents given such short notice, would you have sent your children off the island with their teacher or kept them at home?
2. Throughout the book, Lily changes her mind several times about why she decided to take Catherine with her. Which motivation do you think was most powerful for her in that moment?
3. Compare Ava's and Joseph's methods of dealing with their children's absence and the occupation generally. How do their needs compete?
4. Why do you think the Walkers' deaths were included in Ava's story? Discuss the necessity of imports for people living in isolated areas like Guernsey.
5. Describe the development of Ava's relationship with Becker. Do you think she would have had an affair under any other circumstances?

6. Why do you think Peter decided against enlisting? How do community and ritual help us cope with times of enormous stress?
7. When Lily finally tells him the truth on her deathbed, Peter is left with a very complicated situation to figure out. How do you think he handled it? Do you think the reveal changed the way he grieved for Lily?
8. How would you characterize Henry and Catherine's relationship? What role does Henry play in the eventual reunion of his family?
9. What did you think of the arrangement Ava, Joseph, and Peter made regarding Catherine's care? If you were in Ava's or Joseph's position, could you allow someone else to raise your child? If you were in Peter's position, could you leave your daughter with people she hardly knows?
10. How does Lily's past shape her relationships in Saint Austell? Is she able to make any decisions without the interference of her secrecy and shame? In the end, would you consider Lily a good person?

# A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR

**What inspired you to write *For Those Who Are Lost*? How do you approach writing a new book?**

In the summer of 2019, I attended the Yale Writers' Workshop, and the experience made me think about writing in an entirely new way. I realized it's more important to write something that takes hold of your imagination rather than to try to conform to a notion of what sells or others' expectations of you and your work. If you do the former, you'll have written something you truly love. A couple of months later, when reading about World War II, I came upon information about Guernsey in June 1940, when five thousand students and their teachers were evacuated off the island in a single day. Less than a week later, German troops invaded and would keep these families apart for five long years. I couldn't stop thinking about the heart-wrenching decisions those parents had to make. It felt like the perfect starting place for a story.

**On the surface, Lily's decision to take Catherine is amoral and wrong. Was it challenging to write through that and still present Lily as a sympathetic character?**

For me, Lily began as a sympathetic character, trapped in a terrible marriage with no possibility of escape. When she is presented with an unexpected opportunity to leave the island, she has no idea that she's about to make a terrible, life-altering decision. When forced to choose between going with the evacuees to Manchester or setting off on her own in a new land, she tells herself that she can't abandon the four-year-old in her care, but neither can she take the girl's nine-year-old brother. Later, she struggles with the ramifications of what she has done and explores the hidden motives and consequences of her actions. In the chaos of war, she felt like she was saving a child but soon realizes she has stolen from her daughter the family and future she was meant to have.

**The information about the Guernsey occupation—rationing, surveillance, and limited imports of medicine—is equal parts fascinating and horrifying. How did you research these hardships?**

Research is one of my favorite parts of writing! For this novel, I studied books on the war, devoured articles, talked to World War II veterans, and watched films made both during and after the war to get the feel of the time period. However, the most important source of information was reading firsthand accounts of Guernsey's evacuation and occupation. It gave me a sense of the panic and anxiety that took hold of the island residents. I was also able to find videotaped interviews with people who had either been evacuated or were left behind, witnessing the horrors of war. Watching them

retell their stories sixty or seventy years later, you could see that they had never forgotten a single detail of that terrible time and how it had changed them to go through it.

**Why did you decide to keep Catherine with Peter after being re-introduced to her birth family? In your research, did you find any examples of real-life families who made a similar decision?**

There were a wide variety of endings for the evacuated children after the war. Many of the older teens stayed in England with their adopted families to finish school and begin their adult lives. While some children were happy to return to their homes in Guernsey, others suffered a second round of trauma, distressed at being forced to leave their new families and their lives in England. A fraction were never accounted for at the end of the war, leaving their families to cope with a permanent loss.

I think Peter's reluctance to give up Catherine is a beautiful picture of what it must have been like for Lily, and perhaps it helps him come to forgive her. He overcame his own fear of losing his daughter and chose to let the truth come out. However, the truest love in the book is Ava's sacrificial love for her child. When she discovers that Catherine is still alive, she refuses to allow her to go through any more turmoil. Taking her from Peter would cut her off from any parent she had ever known, and Ava couldn't bring herself to do that after everything Catherine had already been through. Joseph was still struggling after being released from a French prison camp, and

Henry was just fourteen, so this was a decision Ava had to make on her own, another split-second call that changed everyone's lives.

**Although guilt plays an obvious role in the book, the characters ultimately choose forgiveness. Why was this important for you to include?**

Life can be messy and complex because we are imperfect human beings. We all need forgiveness at times as well as the ability to forgive in order to have healthy relationships. It's an integral part of happiness.

**Do you relate to any of the book's characters in particular? Who would you most want to befriend?**

I had an equal love for Lily and Ava, two women who have to cope the best they can during the hardships of war. Lily is the more flawed character, but Ava also proves we're only human. We make mistakes and do the best we can with the life we're given. The character I would most like to befriend is Henry. Even as a child, he had such resilience and strength. In the end, he's the glue that holds everyone together.

**What drew you to historical fiction as a writer?**

When I decided to write a novel, I pulled out my five favorite books and spread them out to look at them. The common denominator was that they were all historical. I realized then my love of history and research were perfectly suited to writing historical fiction.