

'Til I Want No More

"A satisfying tale of one woman's secrets returning to haunt her. . . .Pearson rises to another level with this excellent story."

Publishers Weekly, starred review of *'Til I Want No More*



About Robin W. Pearson



Robin W. Pearson's writing sprouts from her Southern roots and her love of her husband and seven children. Both lend authenticity to her novels. After graduating from Wake Forest University, she has corrected grammar up and down the East Coast in her career as an editor and writer that started with Houghton Mifflin Company twenty-five years ago. Since then she has freelanced with magazines, parenting journals, textbooks, and homeschooling resources. Follow her on her blog, "Mommy, Concentrated," where she shares her adventures in faith, family, and freelancing.

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Q&A WITH ROBIN W. PEARSON

Read this Q&A with your book group and discuss how hearing the author talk about the novel deepened your understanding of key themes and characters in the story.

Q: What was your inspiration for this story?

I tend to cling to the past and my mistakes like they're life rafts, when in reality, they're dragging me under and away from God's saving grace. *'Til I Want No More* is both a confession and an admonition: When Jesus says in Luke 6:37, "Forgive, and you will be forgiven," it includes forgiving Robin. I must trust what God says about me and not let anything or anyone—my husband, children, parents, friends, enemies, work, success, or failure—tell me who I am.

Q: Tell us a little bit more about Maxine. Why did you want to write a character like her?

Maxine carried a burden most of her life—an unmet need, a search for identity, an emptiness she tried to fill with her parents, a romance, young motherhood, and finally her fiancé. For me, Celeste represents those burdens, the secret hurts or sins we all carry and hide from the world. She also stands for the blessings our burdens can become once we let God in and trust Him. Like Maxine, we find our hope, identity, and redemption through Christ.

Q. What role does faith play in this story?

Faith is my main character. Evidence of Maxine's faith weaves through her dreams, the words of her articles, and her day-to-day conversations at the kitchen table and in the pastor's study. Her lack of faith is what drove her away from her family and her growing faith is what drew her back. Though it seems down for the count in Maxine's heart, faith eventually emerges as the hero, victorious. Faith saves the day.

Q. What was your process like as you began to craft these characters?

Before I wrote word one—which eventually became the second chapter—I determined the theme for the story. That theme shaped and molded the characters as I considered key questions: What are their struggles? How many siblings does Maxine have, and what are their family dynamics? What happened to the child-Maxine that formed the adult-Maxine? How will their strengths, weaknesses, and actions support the theme and further its development within the story? What do my characters need to learn, let go of, hold on to? As I fashioned my characters, I made sure they answered these questions and supported the overriding theme.

Q. What was the most challenging part about writing this story?

The structure of *'Til I Want No More* is integral to the development of the story, and maintaining this structure challenged me. I divided the book into months, seven and all, a meaningful number to believers. Within each month, readers will find a premarital counseling session with Pastor Atwater, Maxine, and Teddy; one of Maxine's dreams; and a magazine article written by Maxine. Each element works to reveal more about the main character and move along the story.

Q. What is one piece of encouragement that you want readers to take away from reading this story?

'Til I Want No More is no “Will they or won't they?” romance. It reveals the love story between God and Maxine, His pursuit of her. God is passionate about His children. He uses situations in our lives to reveal more about His greatness than to point out our weaknesses and flaws. He lives to love us, not to condemn us.



Conversation Starters

Exploring the Mother-Daughter Relationships in *'Til I Want No More*

Mother-daughter relationships play a key role in *'Til I Want No More*. Each mother and daughter has her own perspective of the same experience. Each mother tries to do what's best for her child, but we see that what they say or do isn't always received the way it was intended. With your book club, or with your own mother or daughter if you're reading this book with them, read these passages from the story and then respond to the following questions.

Chapter 6, page 67:

Those lessons hadn't hurt as much as the day Vivienne turned her frail profile from Maxine and left her standing on the top step. She hadn't stroked her daughter's hair or kissed her good-bye. She'd just picked up her small suitcase and nudged Maxine out of the way. The child had felt her mama was gone long before her taillights disappeared around the corner.

After her husband passes away, Vivienne leaves Maxine in the care of Mama Ruby while she goes to get her life in order. Can you see how Vivienne's attempt to do the right thing by her daughter might have been seen as a lack of love or care by others around her? How would you have felt if you were Maxine? If you were Vivienne, do you think Maxine's feelings of abandonment [because of your choice to leave her with Mama Ruby] are justified? Why do you think this one choice Vivienne made left such a mark on their mother-daughter relationship for years to come?

Chapter 24, page 289:

Years later, Maxine decides to keep her marriage and divorce a secret from her mother, choosing to not tell her anything about how her relationship with JD ended. Her choice, as we see in the story, has enormous consequences for Celeste, JD, and the whole family:

“Mother, I didn’t know what to do. I just knew what I didn’t want to do. And that included telling you and First John and listening to you bash JD for the rest of my life, pointing out how wrong he was and how stupid I was and how disappointed you were. It was my decision to let him go so he wouldn’t ruin his life, too. He didn’t deserve that when he was only trying to help me. So . . . I decided not to say anything until I could figure something out. I threw away every letter JD wrote, ignored all his phone calls, nodded along when you celebrated our breakup.”

“You mean your divorce. Something I never would’ve celebrated had I known.” Vivienne didn’t try to hide her bitterness.

Why is Vivienne so hurt by Maxine’s choice? Was Maxine’s decision to keep her marriage to JD a secret from her mother a wrong choice? Are her reasons for not telling her mother about the divorce valid? Why or why not?

Chapter 33, page 411:

“You can’t be mad at Mama, Max. She was looking out for me. Thanks to her, I felt like I belonged, really belonged. If I can forgive you for not telling me, can’t you forgive her for telling me?” Celeste looped her arm through Maxine’s.

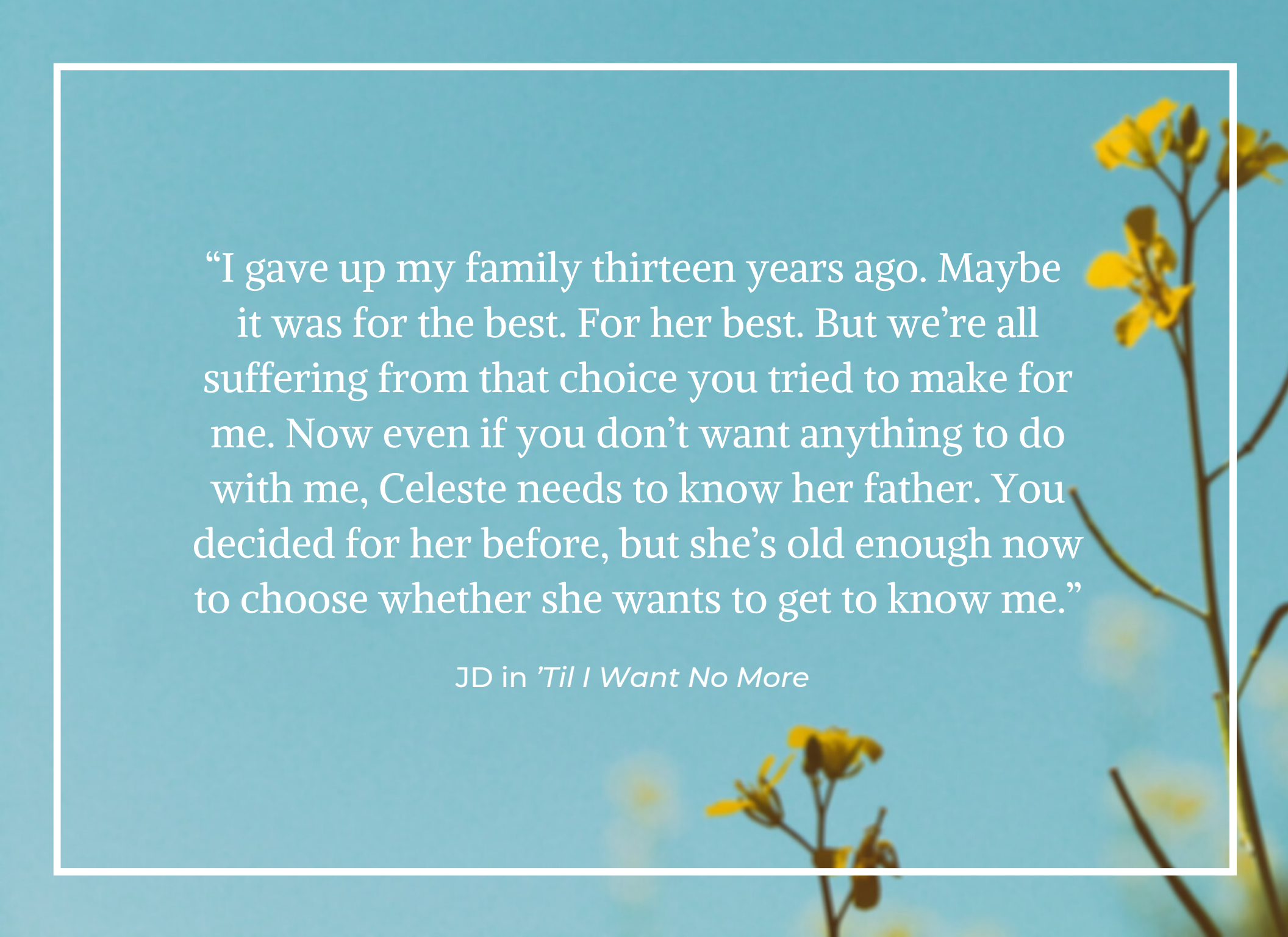
Vivienne tells Celeste that the teen is really Maxine's daughter. Does Vivienne make the right decision? Why do you think Maxine was upset that her mother told Celeste the truth? If you were Celeste, what would have been your response to discovering the truth?

In many ways, Celeste's experience of being raised by her grandmother mimics Maxine's own experience of being raised partly by Mama Ruby. If you were Celeste, would you have felt any resentment after finding out all along your birth mother had been so close and never said anything?

Closing thoughts:

Once the truth about Celeste, Maxine's marriage, and why Vivienne left Maxine with Mama Ruby are all out on the table, how do you think these three women will be able to move forward to a healthier place in their relationships? How will the truth bring healing for these mothers and daughters? Has reading about mother-daughter relationships in this book had any impact on your own familial relationships? Have any of these scenes helped to provide insight or a different perspective to your own situation?'

Notes:



“I gave up my family thirteen years ago. Maybe it was for the best. For her best. But we’re all suffering from that choice you tried to make for me. Now even if you don’t want anything to do with me, Celeste needs to know her father. You decided for her before, but she’s old enough now to choose whether she wants to get to know me.”

JD in *'Til I Want No More*

Discussion Questions

1 Mama Ruby says, “Forgiveness don’t always soften the consequences.” What consequences Maxine facing at the beginning of the story? What about JD? Celeste? Vivienne? Which characters extend or receive forgiveness, and what happens as a result?

2 At the end of her first premarital counseling session, Maxine says, “I wonder what else God sees when He sees me.” Why does Maxine wrestle with her identity? What do you learn about her struggles through her dreams and monthly columns? How does your view of her change as the pages of her story unfold? How well do you know yourself? What do you think God sees when He sees you?

3 Maxine’s past inserts itself into her life when her childhood friend calls her Maxie, a nickname Maxine had left behind her. JD needles Maxine when he refers to her fiancé as Teddy Bear. And Maxine has special reasons for calling Vivienne Mother and her grandmother Mama Ruby.

What do these names and nickname preferences say about how these characters see themselves and others? Why did some biblical characters (Abraham, Sarah, Paul) get new names?

4 After Maxine and Teddy begin arguing during one of their premarital counseling sessions, Pastor Atwater reminds them, “You should each be a safe place where the other can demonstrate or express your passion and personality. You seek shelter in each other, not from each other.” Do you have a spouse or close friend who is your safe place? Are you a safe place for someone else? Why is this so important in relationships?

5 JD warns Maxine, “The truth isn’t your enemy.” Evelyn believes that living a lie “affects generations.” Mama Ruby tells her, “You young people today talk about your truth and what’s real to you. Don’t you know it’s either true and real, an opinion or a lie? Truth don’t change. It don’t need to be processed, just believed and accepted.”

Why does it sometimes feel safer to hide the truth? What are some benefits of having the truth come to light, even if it's painful or unpleasant? In a world filled with relativism, do you still believe in this absolute? How might a lens you have—the way you were raised or something you experienced—affect your views?

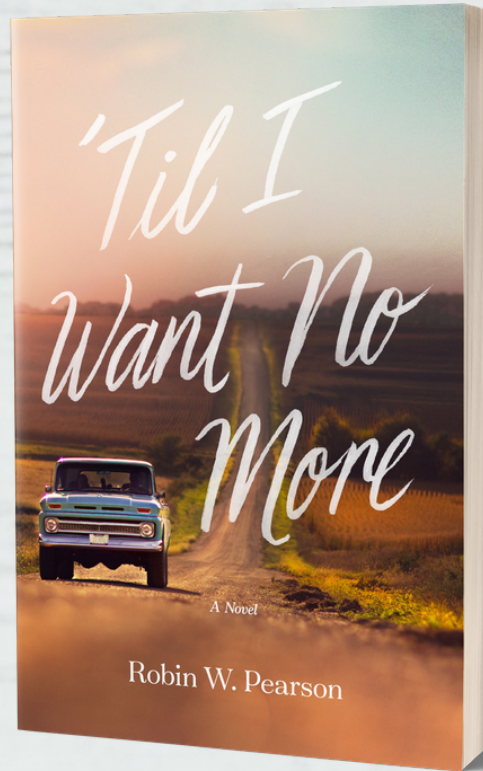
6 Mama Ruby likens her special pork roast recipe to a marriage: “A lot goes into it, things you can’t anticipate or know about ahead of time—sweet, sour, savory,” all of which works together to make a good marriage. What are some of the “sweet, sour, savory” things that have gone into your marriage or family? Do you agree that they work together for good?

7 Maxine feels she’s “not enough” in many ways, and she isn’t sure of what her “whole self” will look like when all the pieces of her life are stitched together and the truth is revealed. What would you say to her if you were Vivienne or Lilian or Reverend Atwater? Have you ever felt “not enough”? Who or what are some of the more memorable parts of your life story, past or present? Are there chapters you wish you could rewrite? What are some new chapters you’re looking forward to?

8 Maxine thought she was making a fresh start when she was baptized in that church in Valdosta, Georgia. But “even saved [and] sanctified” hasn’t stopped Maxine from responding to challenging situations by shutting down or running away. Mama Ruby reminds her: “Trusting God is an act of the will. It isn’t easy to fight your nature. Worryin’ and fussin’ over a matter come easy to you. That don’t mean you do nuthin’, but that somethin’ may mean standin’ still. Believers spend much of their time waitin’ and watchin’.” What’s your go-to response when you’re looking for answers to questions life throws at you? Read Luke 9:23. How often must we deny our true nature? What does Maxine need to do to truly start over? What does waiting and watching look like to you?

9 When Teddy bails on a date with Maxine, she wonders, “How can you really know me without learning about all the puzzle pieces—my friends and my family—that make up my life?” What advice would you give to Maxine and Teddy as they go through premarital counseling? Do you have someone in your life who knows all your puzzle pieces? Or are parts of the puzzle hidden from certain people?

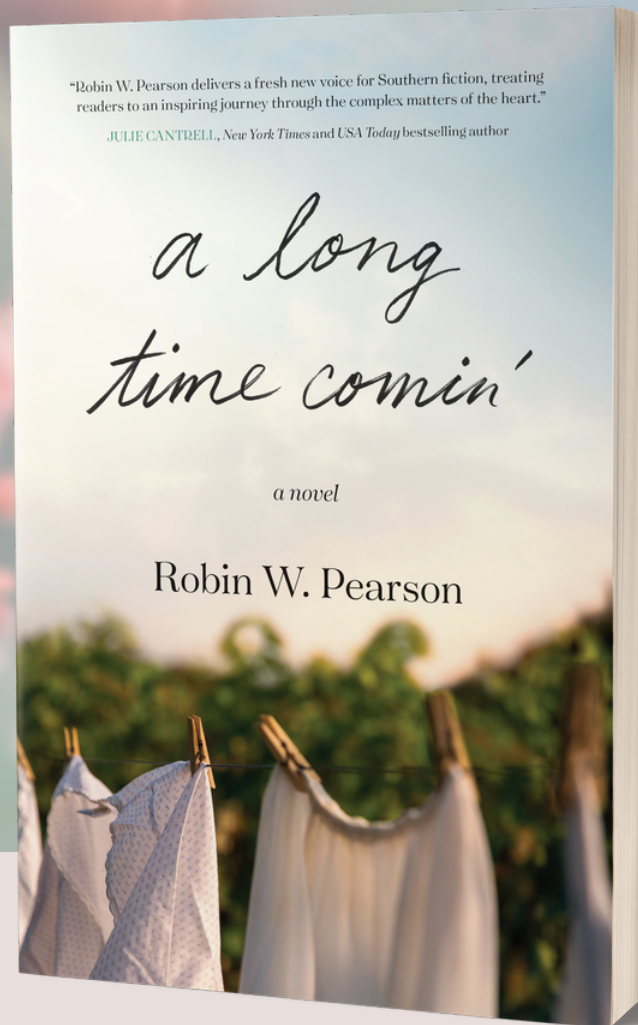
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for your book club!

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