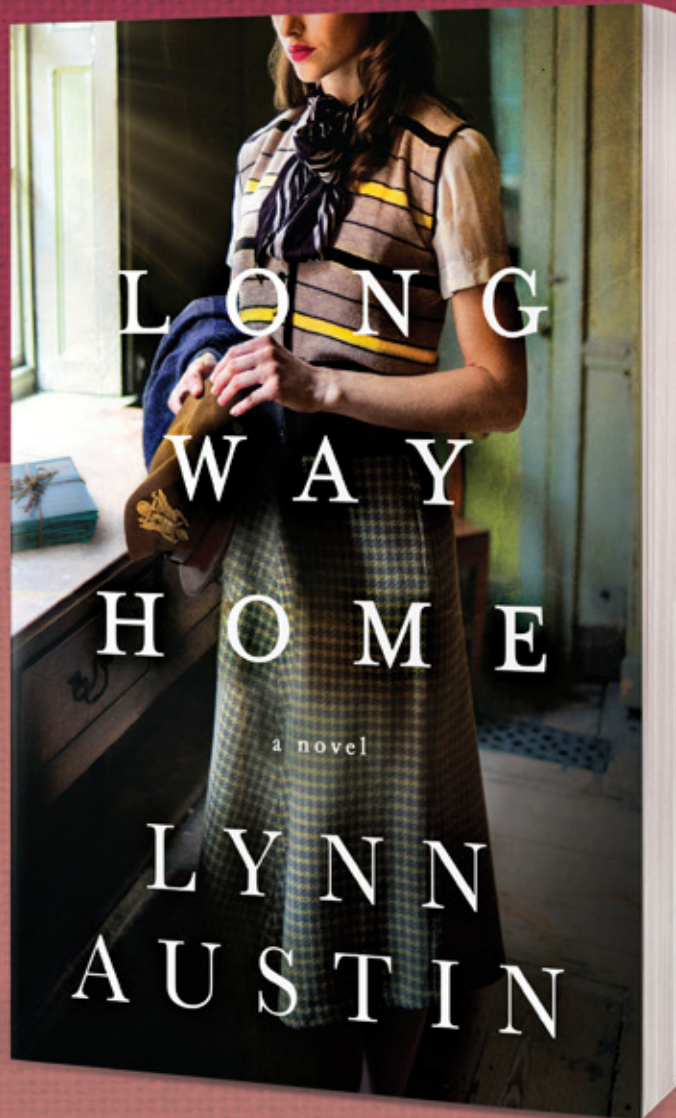


BOOK CLUB KIT



In this gripping portrait of war and its aftermath, a young woman searches for the truth her childhood friend won't discuss after returning home from World War II. In her quest for answers, she crosses paths with a woman whose own perilous journey of exile and survival an ocean away was made possible only by the kindness and courage of a series of strangers she met, including one man who changed the course of her life.



About the Author

LYNN AUSTIN has sold more than one and a half million copies of her books worldwide. A former teacher who now writes and speaks full-time, she has won eight Christy Awards for her historical fiction and was one of the first inductees into the Christy Award Hall of Fame. One of her novels, *Hidden Places*, was made into a Hallmark Channel Original Movie. Lynn and her husband have three grown children and make their home in western Michigan. **Visit her at lynnaustin.org.**

A Note from the Author

Dear Friends,

I'm very excited that you've chosen *Long Way Home* for your book club selection. I think you'll find it provides a lot of topics for discussion.

I was inspired to write this novel after thinking about my dad, who enlisted in the Navy to fight in WWII at the age of eighteen. He became a signalman and served on a submarine chaser in the Pacific theater. Dad never talked about his experiences and didn't suffer from PTSD like Jimmy Barnett and Joe Fiore do, but we noticed that certain activities would inexplicably cause him anxiety—such as crossing very long bridges. I began to research what life was like for returning veterans like my dad, since PTSD wasn't recognized or properly treated until after the Vietnam War. In my novel, I've tried to portray accurately the attitudes and treatments that were available at that time.

The true story of the *St. Louis's* ill-fated voyage has always haunted me. The unwillingness of so many nations to provide refuge is heartbreaking. And with millions of people currently displaced by war, political upheaval, and food crises, the plight of refugees today is still overwhelming and tragic. I hope *Long Way Home* will heighten our awareness of what it means to be forced to seek asylum, and lead us to open our hearts to help search for solutions.

On a happier note, I had a lot of fun writing about Buster the three-legged dog. While my husband and I don't have any pets at the moment,



we know from the ones we've had in the past how much love and comfort they give. I modeled Buster after my sister's dog, Franny, who was rescued from an animal shelter and has become a much-loved family member. Buster came into Peggy Serrano's life at just the right time, too, and not only changed her life, but the lives of servicemen overseas as Jimmy retold his story. It might be fun to talk about the pets that your book club members cherish and tell how they came into your lives.

The setting for the novel is the Hudson River Valley in New York State, where I grew up. I still miss the familiar mountains and countryside that I described in the story.

It's always a treat to return home for a visit and hike the trails to area lakes and forests. And nearby, there really is a thoroughbred horse farm like Blue Fence Farms.



ABOVE: Lynn's dad, who joined the Navy at age 18 and fought in the Pacific during WWII.

I hope you enjoy reading and discussing *Long Way Home*. Please feel free to write to me with any questions you have about the book. I would love to hear what your group thinks of it.

Blessings!



Opportunities to Give Back

In *Long Way Home*, Peggy sees firsthand the physical and emotional toll war takes on her friend Jimmy and determines to find ways to help him heal. She searches for friends who were with him during the darkest parts of the war, and even sneaks her dog, Buster, into the hospital where Jimmy is receiving treatment. Together with your book group, consider ways that you might take inspiration from Peggy and volunteer to help veterans in your local community.

Things you or your book group might do to give back:

Write a Note of Gratitude

While serving overseas, Jimmy found encouragement in the letters he received from home. As a book group, consider writing letters expressing your appreciation to those who are far from home serving to protect our freedom. You could also write letters to veterans, thanking them for their service. Check out the following list of nonprofits that help get letters of encouragement to active-duty and retired military service members:

- A Million Thanks - (WEBSITE)
- Operation Gratitude - (WEBSITE)
- Soldiers' Angels - (WEBSITE)

Pay It Forward

In *Long Way Home*, Jimmy is traumatized by his experience as an Army medic on the front lines and, when he returns home, struggles with what we now recognize as PTSD. As a book group, consider making a donation to organizations that help veterans coping with PTSD. You might also look for nonprofits in your community or nationwide that provide therapy and support for active-duty and former members of the military who are struggling with PTSD:

- All Secure Foundation - (WEBSITE)
- Mighty Oaks Foundation - (WEBSITE)
- Hope for the Warriors - (WEBSITE)
- Gary Sinise Foundation - (WEBSITE)
- Operation Heal Our Patriots - (WEBSITE)

Volunteer

Peggy sneaks her three-legged dog Buster into the hospital where Jimmy is receiving treatment. Jimmy relates to Buster, an unofficial therapy dog, in a way that helps him heal. There are many local and national organizations that train therapy dogs to help people coping with trauma, illness, or a myriad of other issues. As a book group, look for opportunities to volunteer together either by helping train a therapy dog, giving to organizations that train them, or donating dog food or other supplies to local or national organizations focused on providing therapy dogs to active-duty or retired military personnel:

- Freedom Service Dogs - (WEBSITE)
- K9s for Warriors - (WEBSITE)
- America's VetDogs - (WEBSITE)

RIGHT: Buster was inspired by a real dog! Though not an official therapy dog, the real Buster, named Franny, belongs to Lynn's sister Peggy and has provided love and companionship to their family for about five years. Unlike Buster, Franny has all four legs.



TRIVIA—Long Way Home

Find the answers on page 6

How good is your memory? Give your group five minutes to answer the questions below. Have a small prize ready—or just give bragging rights if you're meeting virtually—to the person who gets the most correct answers!

- 1 Before the war, where are Gisela and her family living?
- 2 How old are Gisela and Sam when they first meet on board the *St. Louis*?
- 3 What is the name of the prison camp Gisela is sent to where Jimmy first meets her?
- 4 Who offers to relay messages to Sam when Gisela goes into hiding at Hospital Sint-Augustinus?
- 5 Who runs the nursing school Gisela attends?
- 6 How does Peggy come to have Buster as her pet?
- 7 Buster has only three legs, so he's affectionately been given what nickname?
- 8 In the novel, Peggy visits Paul at the farm where Paul is a trainer. What's the name of the farm?
- 9 After Jimmy's friend Mitch O'Hara is wounded in the Battle of the Bulge, what happens to Mitch?
- 10 During the war, Jimmy's two closest friends are Mitch O'Hara and who else?



QUESTION & ANSWER with Lynn Austin

1. What motivated you to write a story about a soldier returning from WWII and the challenges he faces?

My dad was a WWII veteran who enlisted in the Navy at age eighteen. While he didn't suffer from PTSD, thankfully, he never talked about his time in the service, although it surely had affected his life—as it had the lives of thousands of other returning vets. I wanted the novel to show the difficulties vets faced in returning to civilian life after everything they had endured during the war.



2. How much research did you do on the WWII time period and the specific challenges faced by soldiers returning home?

I researched the true story of the voyage of the passenger ship *St. Louis* as told by survivors, as well as life in Nazi-occupied Europe, especially for Jews in hiding. I needed to know about the work of Army medics, the Allied liberation of concentration camps, and life for survivors in the aftermath. Much of my research also concentrated on the challenges faced by returning veterans and their families. I read many first-person accounts from vets and their families that helped bring my characters' stories to life. Post-traumatic stress disorder was not fully understood until the Vietnam era. It was called battle fatigue or shell shock at the time of this novel. Psychiatry was in its infancy, and the only available treatments were those I highlighted in the story.

3. As your story developed, did any characters surprise you, or did the story line unfold in surprising ways?

Joe Fiore is a wounded Army veteran and friend of Jimmy's whom Peggy meets as she tries to piece together Jimmy's story. Joe also suffers from PTSD. I was surprised that he became such an integral part of the story as I was writing it, and I wanted to explore his life and future as well.

4. Who was your favorite character to write and why?

Peggy became my favorite because she is so sweet and caring in spite of the difficult life she has had and the challenges she now faces. I hope readers will be rooting for her to finally blossom and thrive.

5. How do you hope this story resonates with your readers?

Fiction can be a great medium to vividly illustrate important truths. In this case, I hope the novel will be a reminder of the need to love others as Christ loved us, no matter what our differences are.



ANSWERS

TRIVIA—Long Way Home

From questions on page 4



No peeking! Turn this page upside down to see the correct answers from the trivia game on page 4.

6 How does Peggy come to have Buster as her pet?
Answer: After Peggy's mother dies, he shows up at Pop's auto-repair garage and Peggy takes him in

7 Buster has only three legs, so he's affectionately been given what nickname?
Answer: Tripod

8 In the novel, Peggy visits Paul at the farm where Paul is a trainer. What's the name of the farm?
Answer: Blue Fence Farm

9 After Jimmy's friend Mitch O'Hara is wounded in the Battle of the Bulge, what happens to Mitch?
Answer: He's taken to Bastogne and later dies in an air strike

10 During the war, Jimmy's two closest friends are Mitch O'Hara and who else?
Answer: Frank Cishek

1 Before the war, where are Gisela and her family living?
Answer: Berlin, Germany

2 How old are Gisela and Sam when they first meet on board the St. Louis?
Answer: Gisela is 16 and Sam is 18

3 What is the name of the prison camp Gisela is sent to where Jimmy first meets her?
Answer: Buchenwald

4 Who offers to relay messages to Sam when Gisela goes into hiding at Hospital Sint-Augustinus?
Answer: Sister Veronica

5 Who runs the nursing school Gisela attends?
Answer: Catholic nuns

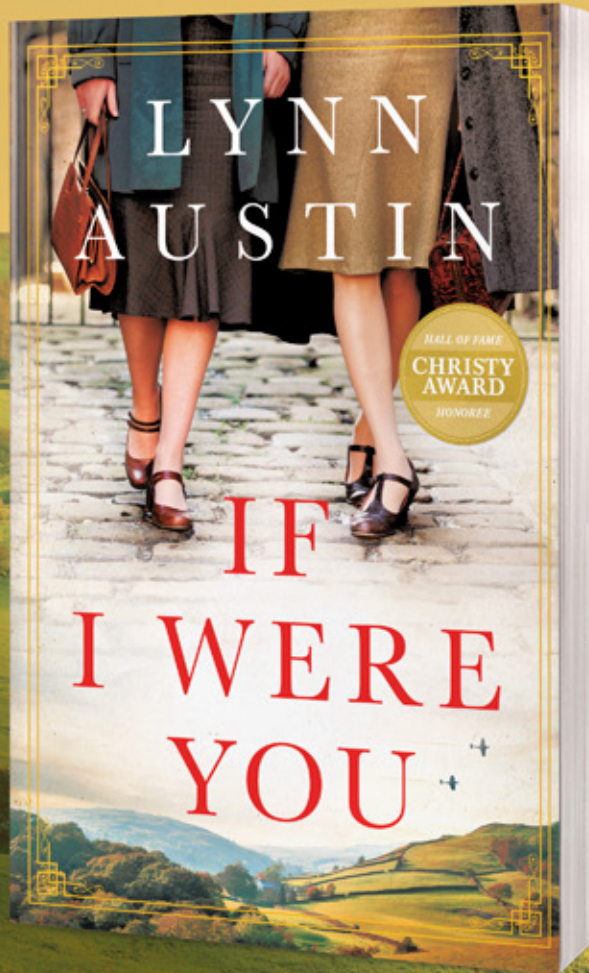


Discussion Questions

1. This novel includes two stories, which start out happening a few years apart and then converge near the end of the book. Did you find one story line more compelling than the other, or did they both hold your interest? Did you like the way they intertwined?
2. Peggy's father and his live-in girlfriend don't treat her very well. Why do you think that is? Is there anything that might excuse or justify their behavior? Is there anything different you think Peggy should have done in response?
3. Sam and Gisela meet and fall in love when they are quite young, then they are separated for many years and through many tragedies. Yet their love endures. Does that seem realistic under the circumstances, or is it just a storybook ending?
4. How does Joe try to address his PTSD? Which parts of his self-treatment are effective, and which are destructive? How does Barbara's reaction help him? What kind of a future do you envision for the two of them?
5. Peggy finds satisfaction—and makes some new friends—in her project to remind Jim of all the good things he's accomplished. Why is that rewarding for her?
6. The fate of the *St. Louis* and its passengers is taken from actual historical records. Why did Cuba and the US refuse to let the passengers come ashore? What parallel situations are we seeing in today's headlines?
7. Peggy has a hard time feeling loved and accepted. What is it about her background that contributes to this? What helps her overcome this uncertainty and accept first the Bernetts' love and eventually Paul's?
8. Buster, "the famous three-legged dog," has a significant role to play, both in the stories Jim told about him and in the way he connects with Jim when Peggy and Joe smuggle him in to visit. How have pets or other animals been important in your life?
9. Gisela and her fellow refugees experienced great kindness from Christians in Belgium. Did this part of the story surprise you?
10. How did you feel about the doctor's attempts to "cure" Jim of his battle fatigue (what we now refer to as PTSD)? In what ways has the treatment of mental illness improved since the 1940s? Where is there still room for improvement?
11. Are there veterans in your family, past or present, who have suffered from PTSD? If you or a loved one has dealt with this kind of trauma, what can you share about your experiences that might help someone who is going through something similar?
12. The Bernetts place a lot of faith in Jimmy's doctor, even though—by today's standards—they probably shouldn't have. In contrast, today we find many people dismissing expert medical opinions. Where is the middle ground? How should we evaluate the advice of experts when it goes against our instincts?
13. The theme of home is a recurring one in this book. How do each of the main characters find their "long way home"? What does home mean to you? Have there been times in your life when you struggled to find or make a home for yourself?
14. Chaplain Bill gives Jim a Bible passage (ROMANS 8:38-39) to think about. In what ways does it help him? Is there a particular passage from the Bible that has been especially meaningful to you during a difficult time in your life?



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FOREWORD REVIEWS

Wilhelmina Brewster and Mike Dolan are two very different people—one is trying to figure out how to live, the other how to die.

Available as an e-book at your favorite e-tailer.

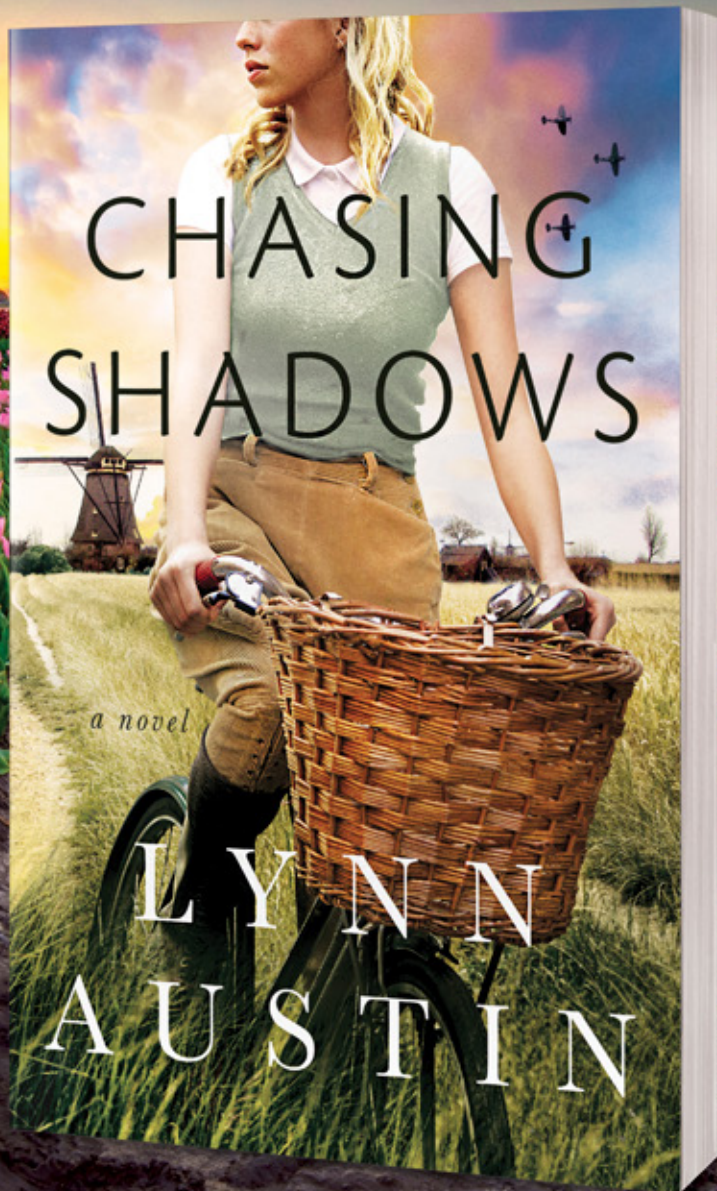


The Wish Book Christmas

A highly anticipated follow-up to *If I Were You*, this nostalgic holiday novella reminds us that sometimes the most meaningful gifts are the ones we least expect and don't deserve.



VISIT LYNNAUSTIN.ORG



“[An] excellent tale. . . This is a must-read for fans of WWII inspirationals.”

—Publishers Weekly, starred review

The lives of three women are instantly changed when the Nazis invade the neutral Netherlands, forcing each into a complicated dance of choice and consequence. Their paths cross in unexpected, sometimes heartbreaking ways, yet the story that unfolds illuminates the surprising endurance of the human spirit and the power of faith and love to carry us through.

“God has His reasons for allowing this great upheaval. Maybe He’s asking us to join the fight against evil and help redeem this fallen world.”

“I don’t have enough faith for this, Papa.”

“None of us do. All we can do is ask Him each day what He wants us to do.”

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