



# READING GROUP GUIDE

## A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Creating just the right setting for my novels is important to me, and I occasionally agonize over it. Usually, I have something in my head that's kind of an amalgam of a bunch of places, like those dreams when you wake up and say, "I was in my childhood bedroom but it was in a foreign country and I didn't have any parents."

For *Not My Boy*, I knew I wanted to write about sisters who lived next door to one another, with one much wealthier than the other. So I created a neighborhood in my head (or so I thought) where there was a mix of homes, not a development but a more organically created place where the homes fit the people. Then, as the plot developed and a crime emerged and the characters came into view—I felt the neighborhood needed a creek, dense woods, muddy hillsides and walking paths, and I started to see it as a former estate with a little history and air of snobbery (which is a big thing around Philadelphia, the legendary estates that get broken up into bite-sized pieces.)

This was all well and good, but despite living near Philadelphia, I had trouble "seeing" parts of it. I needed it to be a place where kids could explore, run, get lost. Where adults could hide. Where large homes could still be tucked in and hidden. I pored over photography and history books, and drove to a few land parcels suggested by my research. But it wasn't until I dropped my daughter off at her friends' house a few towns over—a house I'd been to, at dusk, only twice—that I realized I was longing for a neighborhood just like this one. Somehow, that winding street of gracious homes, that nexus of lanes that went up hill and down, parts completely hidden by large stands of trees, had lodged in my brain a long time ago, during a birthday party drop off. And now, here it was, in my novel-dream-like state.

Over the months when I outlined and wrote and rewrote, I went back to that neighborhood and drove back and forth along the narrow lanes slowly, hoping nobody saw me take the occasional picture or stop to make a note. If I saw someone pulling this kind of Harriet the Spy in an SUV routine on my street, I'd assume all kinds of terrible things. Stalker! Pervert! Unscrupulous Reporter! That's how my mind works (and come to think of it, all those types of people appear in my novels!)



But the average person? Probably thought I was looking for ideas on porticos, cupolas, or what color to paint my shutters. You know, reasons a normal person drives slowly down a street—to steal ideas!

At any rate, I hope I've made Hannah and Hillary's neighborhood as vivid on the page as it is in my mind. And if it reminds anyone of a particular street? Well. . . . you might be right!

Happy reading,  
Kelly

## READING GROUP GUIDE

1. Have any of you ever dreamed of a “family compound,” with relatives nearby, like Hannah and Hillary? Did your dreams change over time, and why?
2. While both Hillary and Hannah love their mother, Eva is sometimes kept removed because of the sisters’ closeness. Have you observed this pattern in other families? And at what cost to the others?
3. The novel contains a number of observations about parenting boys versus parenting girls. For parents— did you notice any differences in the way you or your friends approached this? Do you think Hannah’s attitudes toward Miles’s proclivities and her ex husband’s interests were justified or are a product of her own prejudices?
4. Miles’s relationship with his cousin, Morgan, is one of the reasons the sisters wanted to live near each other. As readers, did you worry about the closeness between them and what might happen as a result? Did you agree with Hannah’s decision to downplay Miles’s issues in order to keep that friendship intact?
5. If Miles were your son or grandson, what disciplinary choices or parenting decisions would you have made differently? Should he and Hannah have stayed in their former school district and toughed it out? Should Hannah have disciplined her son more harshly? Or protected him more fiercely?
6. What were your feelings about Eva’s real estate quest? Do you think it was wrong not to confront Hillary— and inform Hannah— about the illegal financial transaction? Should Eva have threatened her?
7. Even in the midst of an unsolved crime, the neighbors don’t consider cancelling the fall festival. How did you feel about this decision?
8. The relationship between Ben and Hannah is one of the most fraught in the book. Do you think Hannah did the right thing by going to the police with her concerns? And do you think, after the final chapter, that she and Ben will be able to be close friends again?

**NOTE: Kelly (the author) wants all of you to know that she did not base “the world’s bitchiest book club” in her new novel on ANY of the hundreds of reading groups she has visited!**



## A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR



**Many of your novels are set in the Main Line area of Philadelphia, which you have said you find endlessly fascinating. Do you think *Not My Boy* could have been set in another place?**

The desire of close knit sisters to raise their children together is pretty universal, so I think there are many towns in America where this could work. But the other elements—one sister's house much bigger than her sister's next door, neighbors who seem friendly but aren't, the history of the estate, the hilly topography with a creek running through it—all made it seem right to be set in Pennsylvania. I guess I could have found a neighborhood in Pittsburgh, but I was too lazy, haha! (Although I love Pittsburgh and lived there for a few years.) There were lots of neighborhoods nearby that I used as a roadmap.

**You have three daughters. Was it a challenge to base a novel around a young boy?**

Yes, in a way, because there was not as much personal history to draw from. But Hannah was a woman with no brothers, raised by a single mother. Her experience was a girl centric household, and she was not innately in tune with the world of boys. So I related to that aspect of her and channeled it in writing.

***Not My Boy* is your sixth novel. In what ways do you think your work is different from when you started out?**

Stylistically, sentence for sentence, I think all my work is pretty much of a piece. But I think I've grown better at crafting well rounded male characters, better at tempering anger, better at offering hope within the darkness. I'm all about the hope.

**You've written novels in first person, in third person, and with multiple points of view. Do you prefer one over the other?**

I feel most comfortable writing in first person. I just love the intimacy and creating a singular voice. But it's so limiting, especially when writing about crimes and secrets (which I always do!). So I've grown to enjoy and embrace all the flexibility of third person, too.

**What's up next for you?**

I'm plotting out a book about three sisters who commit a crime in high school and hide it from their mother, who stumbles onto clues ten years later. My daughters are not particularly happy about this!



## RECIPES

I've visited **LOTS** of reading groups in person and on Zoom and FaceTime, and I'm always amazed by the creative food they serve.

When I entertain, I like to try familiar favorites with a new twist, something a little creative that's easy to pull off. I recently served root beer floats for dessert but used Hard Root Beer and the crowd went wild (or maybe they were drunk?!)

One of my favorite things is Guacamole and Margaritas – and here's a way making them a little less summery. This take on guacamole is colorful and healthy. And the margarita? Well, I love pear juice with any alcohol, yet I never eat pears. I don't know why this is, but any excuse to make a cocktail even slightly healthy is a great way of justifying your cocktail.

**SALUD!**

## HARVEST GUACAMOLE

### INGREDIENTS:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1 ½ tsps olive oil   | 1 fresh red jalapeño chile pepper,<br>seeded and finely chopped |
| 1 cup fresh pumpkin or butternut squash<br>peeled and cut into small cubes | salt & pepper to taste  |
| 2 avocados, barely ripe  | chopped cilantro to taste                                       |
| 3 Tbsp fresh lime juice  | cumin & cinnamon to taste                                       |
|  | ½ cup pumpkin seeds (pepitas)                                   |

### DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 350
2. Toast pepitas on a cookie sheet, keeping an eye on them, for 3-5 minutes
3. Turn oven up to 400. Cool pepitas on plate and put pumpkin tossed with oil and salt on the cookie sheet
4. Roast until just tender, around 8-10 minutes, depending on the size of your cubes. Cool.
5. Cube the avocado and toss with pumpkin in a bowl. Add lime, chili, and spices to taste and gently toss
6. Top with toasted pumpkin seeds and serve with wholegrain chips (I'm a fan of the original Sun Chips, don't fight me on this, but do your own thing.)

# PEAR MARGARITA

## INGREDIENTS:

2 oz. top shelf tequila  
4 oz. pear nectar  
Juice of half a lemon

1 tsp of honey or maple syrup  
Dash of vanilla  
Cinnamon stick OR dried chili pepper

## DIRECTIONS:

1. Mix in cocktail shaker with ice
2. Pour into glass with ice
3. Garnish with cinnamon or pepper, whichever way you roll.

Serves 2 unless you're thirsty or angry.

