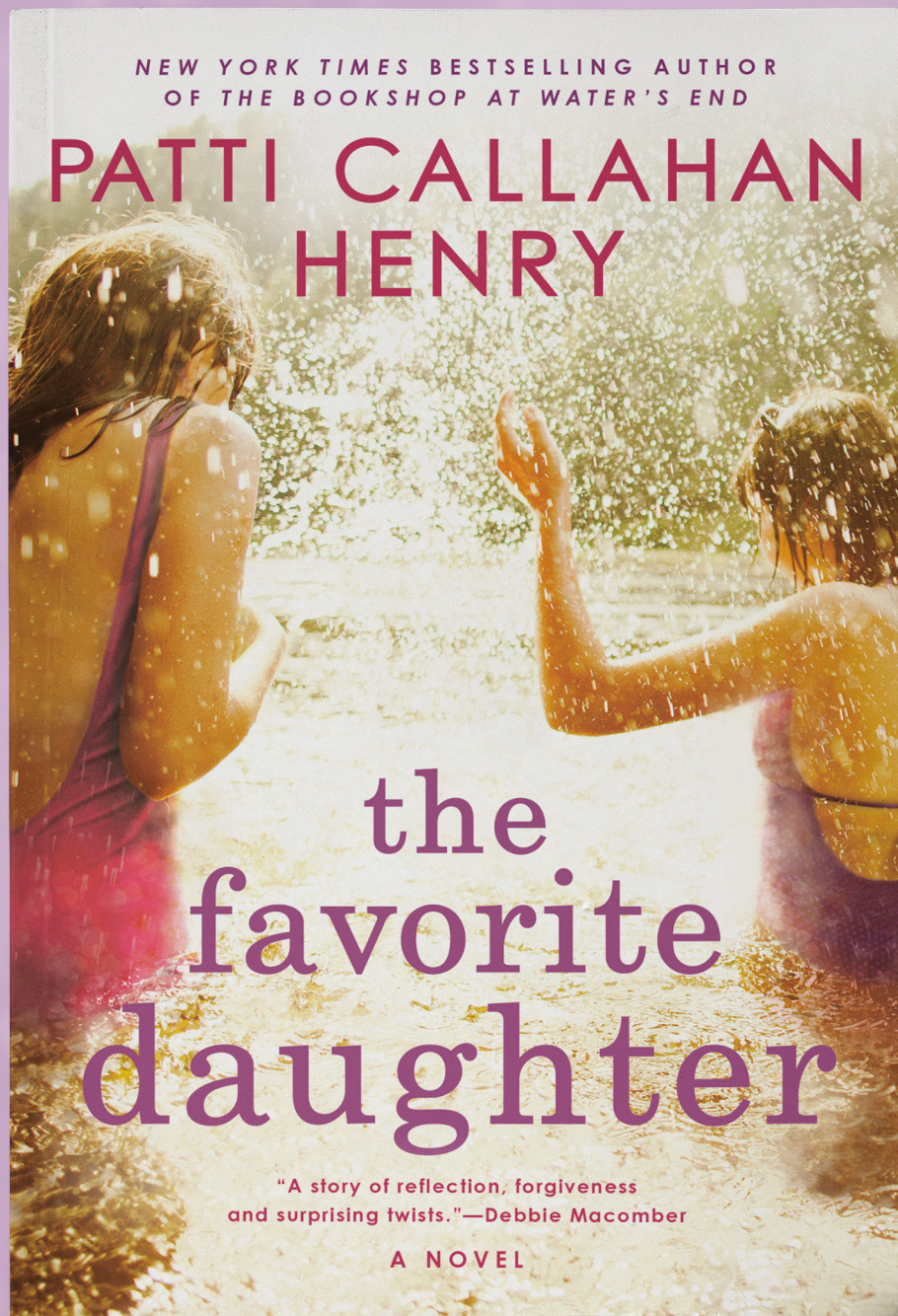


# Book Club Kit





# THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY FOR *the favorite daughter*

PATTI CALLAHAN HENRY

“The problem with memories wasn’t with the ones she couldn’t let go of, but with those that wouldn’t let go of her.”

—Lena Donohue in *The Favorite Daughter*

I have long been fascinated with the world of memory. It’s a world that belongs only to us as individuals; it is a solitary world that can only be shared in the most fragmented way with anyone else. It’s almost as if memory has a secret life: we carry it inside of us and we are tied to it in an inextricable way.

How does memory define us? I often wonder. Who are we without it? Why do memories often have a hold on us and yet they also slip away so easily? Of course, these aren’t questions with solid answers. They are questions we must live into; they are questions that slip between our fingers and our minds.

To answer some of this, I turn to story. This time, I turned to a story where the most prominent figure in my protagonist’s life, her father, is losing his memories.

The Donohue family name was inspired by one of my all-time favorite authors, John O’Donohue, the Irish poet, author and philosopher. His thoughts on memory moved me to write this novel. What he says about questions is this: they are “like a lantern”. And I think that is exactly right. If I take the questions I have about memory and our lives, and I shine it onto the page, a story evolves and grows. That is where *The Favorite Daughter* came from—the lantern light of my questions about memory and family.

Lena Donohue has been betrayed by her sister, and in the painful aftermath, she chooses to separate from her family both geographically and emotionally. But



A photo from Patti’s trip to Ireland



she can't truly separate, at least not in spirit, because she loves her father and her brother, she loves her hometown, and she loves the pub her family owns and operates.

Now that her father is losing his memories, she must decide not only what she will do but also who she will become. Forgiveness never comes easy, and family dynamics are the most complicated thing we experience. I put Lena smack dab in the middle of it all and watched her find her way.

As Lena, her brother Sean and her sister Hallie begin to craft a memory photo album for their father, family secrets echo into all their lives. Lena discovers her true story and opens her heart to her family's past.

It's not often that a writer's past and a story's future mesh as it does here in this tale. Not because I'm the favorite daughter—most likely far from it—but that it also taps into my first career as a Clinical Nurse Specialist who worked with brain injuries and fractured families.

*The Favorite Daughter* is set in Watersend, South Carolina, just as in *The Bookshop at Water's End*. We revisit the establishments, beaches and waterways that define a town and its people. With a sister's devastating betrayal, a local pub full of quirky characters, a family's Irish secret and a charming brother who can't quite wrangle his two sisters together to deal with the crisis, we have a novel about the power of memory, the magnetic draw of family, learning forgiveness and the elusive idea of "home."

Welcome again to Watersend and the families that inhabit this lush land.



Photos from Patti's trip to Ireland

# discussion questions

1. In the prologue, we are at a wedding that has gone horribly wrong. Have you been a part of or heard about a wedding that fell apart at the last minute? Should Colleen have disappeared like she did or stayed to face the situation? Should she have replied to her sister and family or ignored them?
2. After a terrible betrayal, the sisters Colleen and Hallie haven't spoken in ten years. Has there been someone in your life who betrayed you? How did you handle it? How can people reconcile after a betrayal?
3. When Lena changes her life, she changes her name to Colleen. Are names powerful enough to change a life? Have you ever changed your name? Has anyone you know? Can that change signify a different life?
4. Alzheimer's is a terrible disease, and in this novel it both brings the family together and also tears them apart. Have you had an experience with dementia or Alzheimer's? How has it affected you and/or your family and loved ones?
5. When Colleen returns to Watersend from New York City, the memories come flooding back. Have you had an experience where you return to a place and the memories also return? Can memories be hidden in geography? Does landscape hold memories? How did the landscape influence Colleen's transformation?
6. The pub, the Lark, plays a prominent role in the novel. It is a community gathering place as well as a family's heritage. How do you think the pub brought the Donohue family together? The community? Do you have a place like this in your life? Do you think places like this are important to a town or city?
7. Colleen's job as a travel writer keeps her from putting down roots. She realizes later that it also allows her to avoid intimate connections. Are there things you do to keep your heart safe from hurt? Can we keep our hearts safe—and should we? Did staying away end up helping or hurting Colleen?
8. Colleen unearths a secret about her parents, and this discovery opens her eyes to the past in a new way. What had once been confusing now seems clear. Have you discovered something about your family and seen the past through new eyes? Did this change your choices or your life?
9. Colleen connects with the nieces she had never known and this softens her heart. Can children bring a family closer together? Is it the innocence of children or their reminder that family matters? Have children brought you closer to your family in any way?

*Continued on next page.*



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10. At the end of the novel, Colleen travels to Ireland to see the land her father loved. Why do you think it was important for Colleen to visit? Is it important to know your roots? To understand where you came from and why?
11. Shane, Colleen and Hallie's brother, stays above the fray of the sisters' embittered feud while also keeping the family together by running the pub and taking care of their father. Do siblings often find different roles to play in a family? What are yours?
12. The bonds we share with our siblings is an integral part of this novel—the good and the not-so-good. How do these relationships shape each character? How have your sibling relationships shaped your character?
13. Each sister believes the other to be the “favorite.” Do you think this often happens in families? Has it happened in yours? How does that perception affect a child? An adult? You?
14. Hallie attempts to reconcile numerous times, but Colleen won't speak to her or answer her mail until their father falls ill. Can tragedy bring families together? Has it ever brought yours together and how?
15. Colleen has spent the last ten years trying to decide what defines “home.” In the end, she is finally able to do so. How would you define “home,” and what does it mean to you? Can you have more than one home? Is it a place or is it the people?



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Patti Callahan Henry is a *New York Times* bestselling author whose novels include *The Bookshop at Water's End*, *The Idea of Love*, *The Stories We Tell*, and *Driftwood Summer*. As Patti Callahan, she's the author of the *USA Today* bestseller *Becoming Mrs. Lewis*. Short-listed for the Townsend Prize for Fiction, and nominated multiple times for the Southern Independent Booksellers Alliance (SIBA) Book Award for Fiction, Patti is a frequent speaker at luncheons, book clubs, and women's groups.

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# Also by Patti Callahan Henry

