

## A THREAD SO FINE – BOOKCLUB QUESTIONS:

- 1) Shannon and Eliza are on the cusp of adulthood as the story begins in 1946. How well does the author describe the societal changes—particularly around women’s roles—in the country and Midwest, now that WWII is over? How might growing up in the midst of wars—WWI, WWII, Korean War and Vietnam-- have affected their lives thus far?
- 2) Shannon is considered by all to be the less-likely-to-succeed-in-life daughter when she is a child. Eliza is expected to always ‘do the correct thing.’ How does each of the girls’ trajectories change by the tragic circumstances of 1946? How do the girls’ strengths become weaknesses, and vice versa?
- 3) The Malone family’s (and Harvey’s) Catholicism is a theme throughout the book. How is each character’s relationship to religion unique? How do those relationships to religion evolve and change during the twenty years?
- 4) When Eliza meets him, Patrick is a very dark character. How might the war have changed him? Is Shannon right when she says that sometimes those ‘who most appall us deserve our greatest compassion?’ What did she mean when she wrote that to Eliza (p. 235)? Is it possible to have compassion for someone who does evil?
- 6) Shannon spends a year in quarantine for TB. How do you think she would explain the experience to her grandchildren? Which parts would she describe as ‘bad,’ or ‘good?’ How much did her physical and emotional scars from that year impact her life? What would be the most difficult part of a year in quarantine?
- 7) Why do you think Eliza chose to not tell anyone about the attack? Was that the ‘correct’ or brave thing to do, given the gravity of Shannon’s illness? How could she be so clueless about the possibility of pregnancy?
- 8) Unwed mothers in this country often suffered shame and marginalization in the past. How well or poorly did Eliza deal with her circumstance? How did the secrecy around her pregnancy, birth and relinquishment of the baby burden her? Her sister? Her family? What might the reasons have been for the broad cultural intolerance of unwed mothers in mid 20<sup>th</sup> century?
- 9) The rise of second wave feminism is a secondary theme throughout the book. How did Frances Perkins mentorship of Eliza impact her choices in her career, her life? How did their relationship impact the woman she would become? Would Frances Perkins be a relevant mentor for today’s women? Why or why not?
- 10) Shannon believed that Miriam was her niece from the moment she saw her. Was what Shannon did unethical? Why or why not? Why did she feel that that relationship would somehow bring Eliza home? Was she right? At what point, if ever, should she come clean about her secret conviction about Miriam?
- 11) Unresolved trauma can make it impossible for victims to form attachments. Now that Eliza has confided in Shannon, do you think she will be able to heal and find happiness? What would be the best future for her?