

Discussion Questions -- *Breaking and Holding*

***Breaking and Holding* is a layered novel that can be read in many ways. If limited to one of the following, which phrase would you use to describe the novel? In your own words, how would you describe it?** A page-turner full of tension and plot twists? A love story – one of first love, forbidden love, obsessive and unshakeable love? A story that is steamy and sweet, heartbreaking and tragic? The story of two women struggling during the second-wave of feminism?

Patricia's favorite novel is *The Great Gatsby*. In what ways does *Breaking and Holding* pay homage to that classic?

The novel is set in the late 1970s (the Me-Decade) and early 80s. In what ways did that era enhance the story? Could the story work in a present-day setting? Why or why not?

Both Lynn and Patricia struggle as women finding their way to self-actualization in a difficult era. How are the two women alike and different? What obstacles does each character face? Which one would be associated with "the problem with no name" that Betty Friedan wrote about in 1963's *The Feminine Mystique*?

Are the issues they faced still with us today and to what degree? Can women have both a successful career and fulfilling marriage? What life choices and/or sacrifices have you or women you know made in this regard?

In the beginning of the novel, Patricia is reading *Fear of Flying*. Have you read or would you read the novel? Why was it hailed by major writers like John Updike and Henry Miller as destined to be a great and lasting novel? Has it lived up to their expectations? Should Jack be alarmed that Patricia is reading it?

Though all of the novel's characters are flawed, how did you feel about them? Did you have a favorite? Who were you rooting for? Could you relate to their experiences? Their struggles with isolation? Loneliness? Insecurity?

Could the novel be considered a coming of age novel? For Terry? Patricia? Even Lynn?

Are Patricia and Tricia two people? Lynn sees her that way as early as page 4. She sees herself that way on pages 185-186. How did the name-change help her?

Given their differences in interests, could Patricia and Terry be as happy together as they expect to be?

Jack is controlling, tries to manage his wife as a client, and relies on Lynn to help him when Patricia baffles him. But is he a villain with at least a smidgen of a heart? Does he redeem himself? How? Does he love Patricia? And does Patricia love him in some way?

If Patricia and Lynn had met on their own, without Jack's involvement, would they have become friends?

***Breaking and Holding* is a story of infidelity, as are many great works of literature, past and present. Given the era and Lynn's, Patricia's, and Jack's situations, how did you feel about their affairs? Were you inclined to agree with Terry who found infidelity despicable?**

What role do guilt and forgiveness play in the novel?

How important are literature and the arts to life – in general and to you specifically?