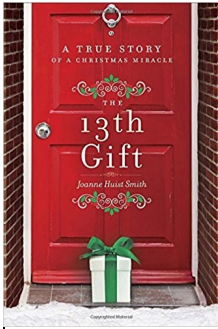




Discussion Guide



About the Book

Book Title: The 13th Gift

Author: Joanne Huist Smith

Published: Penguin/Random House, 2014

Book website: [13th gift.com](http://13thgift.com)

Questions for Discussion

1. What were your general impressions of this book?
 2. This memoir tells the story of the author's walk through grief at Christmas time. Have you had any experiences over the holidays with grief? Did your experience resonate with hers? Why or why not?
 3. Would you recommend this book for someone grieving during the holidays? Why or why not?
 4. Random Acts of Kindness enter the author's life and transform the Christmas experience for both her and the children. How did this affect them? Have you ever had any experiences such as this, either giving or receiving? Explain.
 5. Each person responds to grief in different ways. Consider how Joanne and her three children responded to the loss of their husband/father. Who did you most identify with and why?
 6. The family's Christmas decorations played a role in the story. What do you remember and enjoy about their decorations? How do your holiday and/or Christmas decorations play a role in your holiday celebrations?
 7. Did this book inspire you to conduct random acts of kindness during the holidays? If so, what are your plans?
 8. Read over the MAMs comments on the book. Which of them do you most agree with and why?
 9. In what ways, if any, will this book change your life or perspective?
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NANCY: I enjoyed this book. From the beginning, the author engaged me and I wanted to keep reading to find out how she and her children adjusted to the loss of her husband right before Christmas. As a newspaper journalist, she knows how to write, and so the pages were full of gems, many of which came out of the mouths of her children, who must be writers as well! A great story of random acts of kindness and the journey of grief during the holidays. I'm sure this story will resonate with many who have received unexpected gifts and/or walked through holidays with a heavy heart. Most of us, for sure!



SALLIE: Wasn't her daughter amazing? Children are so wise. She led her mother back into joy by her simple presence, awareness of the gifts, and refusal to allow her family to ignore the joy of Christmas. I was amazed at this little sage living in her house. Sometimes we don't give children credit for the wisdom they provide. I think her mother did.



ABIGAIL: Several aspects of this story really speak to me. I loved the way the community embraced them with the random gifts, with the extended family coming around, and the way they were drawn back into the community, as well. And then there's this magical aspect of how they began to give back, and that became the path to healing. Light shared illuminates the soul so deeply. Yes! Passing on the light at Christmas. Great story!



MOLLY: Hey, maybe this could be a new tradition for the MAMs? Maybe each Christmas we could adopt a person or a family and give them the 12 days of Christmas anonymously. And I bet if we started to do this, we'd receive the 13th gift ourselves! It's more blessed to give than to receive, you know. Didn't this book illustrate that point so well? What do you say, ladies?



PRISCILLA: I loved their Christmas decorations. Weren't those Santa Claus' something? I think those things that we bring out at the holidays that have memories from over the years are so precious. And the 12 gifts they received, were examples of how things don't have to be expensive to be precious. Gift giving is such a wonderful way to express love. Being creative and putting yourself into the gifts is the most important part.



JANE: Now I liked the remodeling of the house in this book. Rearranging your living environment can give you a whole new lease on life! When I got divorced, I hired a master designer and swept all the memories of that man out of my house with a facelift. Well, this isn't quite the same thing, but I was so glad the family embraced the idea of making a new bedroom in the basement. Very cool.



KATHARINE: Well, it might be a cliché, but holidays are really hard for people who are grieving. This book reminds me to open my heart to people during the holiday season, to seek out friends I know who are grieving, and to be more aware of people around me. I remember the year my mother died. We need to love people intentionally during holi-