

BOOK CLUB NEWS

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June 16, 2017

Everything I Never Told You, by Celeste Ng



Discussion Leader: Kathy Hug

Kathy came with props, as you can see in the photo. Can you identify the significance of each? Born 1980 in Pittsburgh of Chinese parents, Celeste Ng is first generation. Her father was a physicist with NASA; her mother was a chemist and professor at Cleveland State University. She is married to Matthew Fox, a Caucasian, and lives in Cambridge, MA. Celeste Ng's writing pattern speaks volumes: it revolves around her four-year-old, writing every day. Celeste Ng wrote four versions of the story before settling on the one we read. When she begins work, she rereads what she wrote the previous day as an entry to creativity. You can access several interviews with the author on line; Kathy recommends Banana Writers: <http://www.bananawriters.com/celestenginterview>.

Discussion began with the title. What was never told? Who was never told? Why were secrets kept? What was the effect on the family? What are the themes? Discuss bullying, secrecy, parental expectations, fear of abandonment, fitting in vs standing out, family dysfunction, suicide, sibling rivalry, women working outside the home, mixed racial marriage, homosexuality. Any more? Do James and Marilyn see their children for who they truly are? Discuss. Why did Lydia fake conversations with friends on the phone? How did the parents' upbringing influence their child rearing? How did their child rearing affect their children? Discuss James' reaction to Nath's Marco Polo experience in the pool; it was one of several agonizingly painful scenes in this novel. What are some others? Is this a period piece? What is the meaning of Marilyn and James' marriage taking place in 1958? Of Lydia's death in 1977? What places this story in the '70's? Did Lydia commit suicide or was her death an accident? Were the

characters sympathetic? Most readers claimed Jack and Lydia to be sympathetic; Hannah's character was not developed enough for an opinion. Do you agree or disagree? Is this story an exaggeration or realistic? How did Ng's style impact the story? Discuss the third-person omniscient narrator: foreshadowing, revealing to the reader what the characters are not aware of; use of the present and past tense. More?

Exuberant was the go-around: I loved the lilting cadence of the writing. All characters were sympathetic, doing their best; they were real and authentic. I could read this book over and over. Excellent writing, sad, realistic. Interesting, not remarkable. I'm mad at Marilyn because she should have continued school while pregnant; I did. Excellent portrayal of a dysfunctional family. I read it as a mystery...wonderful read. I reminded me of *The Lovely Bones*. When it came to my turn, I shared that I lived Lydia's childhood being one of two children in elementary school during the antisemitic 40's...and survived. Can you relate? Let's be assured that as Celeste and Matthew's family grows, it does not emulate *Everything I Never Told You*.



Props (pun intended) to Kathy for a wonderful discussion of a mesmerizing debut novel. Join us after our summer hiatus September 15, 2017, for a discussion of *Another Brooklyn*, by Jacqueline Woodson led by Ann Kepcke.

Check out the summer programs at the library:

<http://www.palmspringsca.gov/government/departments/library/events-your-library/summer-reading-2017>