



PARTING WORDS

by Cass Moriarty

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THE STORY

Parting Words exposes family silences; it is a story that questions how well we really know our parents and those close to us. As three siblings grieve the death of their father, Daniel Whittaker, they discover that before his estate can be finalised, they must hand-deliver a dozen letters (left in the care of his solicitor) to people they have never met. As Richard, Evonne and Kelly track down these strangers, and uncover the words their father wrote many years earlier, they learn much about him, and also about themselves. Their father's childhood, his years in military service, and the events of his adult life are revealed to his family with some surprising – and sometimes shocking – revelations.

Parting Words was inspired by an ordinary dinner conversation about how we often never say what we really feel, or fully express our emotions, because we are tied by convention, politeness or societal norms. What would happen if we said what we actually thought? What if we could right our wrongs? What if we could undo our regrets and vent our grievances?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cass Moriarty lives and writes in Brisbane. Her debut novel, *The Promise Seed*, was longlisted for the 2017 International DUBLIN Literary Award, and shortlisted for the 2016 People's Choice category and the 2013 Emerging Queensland Author category in the Queensland Literary Awards. She has a Bachelor of Business – Communication degree from Queensland University of Technology, and has worked in public relations, advertising and marketing. She and her husband have six children.

DISCUSSION NOTES

1. How does the death of a parent affect the family dynamic for surviving adult children?
2. How do your feelings towards Daniel change during the course of the novel?
3. What is the most difficult thing that each sibling discovers about their father? How does this knowledge change them?
4. How well do you really know your parents and the facts of their early lives? What about your grandparents?
5. Do you think that understanding the past trauma that your parents or grandparents may have suffered enables you to justify their behaviour?

University of Queensland Press – Book Club Notes

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6. The echo of guilt can resonate strongly through the generations. Discuss.
7. What role does atonement play in compensating for our guilt?
8. How difficult is it for young people today to fully comprehend the tragedy and privation of war?
9. Why do some people find it so difficult to speak about their experiences of significant, life-changing events, such as war? What is the result of their silence?
10. What role does intergenerational trauma play in the lasting legacy for people descended from those persecuted during the Holocaust or other genocides?
11. Discuss some of the stereotypes and discrimination around issues explored in the book such as gender roles and sexuality, Indigenous people, returned veterans, and suicide.
12. What are your regrets? How would you choose to rectify them if you could? Do you think that Daniel's instructions helped or hindered his children to deal with his death?
13. Is it important – or even necessary – to honour the last wishes of the dead? Why?
14. Reflect on the complicated process of grieving the loss of someone for whom you had little respect.
15. How important is forgiveness? Is it more important for the person being forgiven, or for the one offering forgiveness? Why?