

Reading Group Guide for *Where the Light Gets In*
by Kimberly Williams-Paisley

1. What were some of the reasons the Williams family publicly concealed Linda's illness for the first twelve months? What were the repercussions of their decision? In a similar situation, would you feel compelled to do the same?
2. Why do you think there is a social stigma associated with dementia? How does the stigma affect those who suffer from it and their loved ones? What steps might be taken to combat it?
3. Kim and her siblings were able to help take care of their parents in different ways. How do you see a similar situation playing out in your own family? How could you offer help even if you live far away?
4. Some people may find behavioral changes to be one of the most challenging aspects of caring for a loved one with dementia. How did you feel about Kim's reactions to her mother's changing personality?
5. Kim's therapist advised her to "turn anger into compassion, and fear into faith." Do you think this is possible? What changes do you think you would see in your own life if you were to adopt this approach?
6. Kim and her siblings struggled to "parent" their own parents (in trying to get the car keys away from their mother, or urging their father to get more help). This situation repeats itself in many family dynamics. How does (or could it) relate to your own family? How would you feel if you were the parent in this situation?
7. Why was it so difficult for Kim's father to seek outside assistance, even when being his wife's sole caregiver was affecting his health?
8. As Linda's illness progressed, Kim and her father both clung to objects that reminded them of who she used to be: a Post-it note, a nightgown, a sun hat. How do mementos help us handle our grief? In what ways do they haunt us?
9. A conversation with a friend, Liz Shatner, made Kim realize she was missing an opportunity to connect with her mother and drove her to the conclusion that, "I need to see her as she is, instead of how I want her to be." How did Liz's advice ultimately help Kim connect with her mother?
10. How have your relationships with your parents evolved over the years? Have those changes strengthened or weakened the bonds within the family?
11. How did you feel about Kim's father's decision to date other women while his wife was still alive? How did you feel about Kim's reaction to the news?

12. If you've cared for a loved one with a terminal illness, what toll did it take on you and how did it affect your family? Did the experience lead you to any new life lessons?

13. The title of the book echoes a line from the Leonard Cohen song "Anthem." How do you interpret this lyric? How is it relevant to Kim's journey?

14. The number of people diagnosed with dementia is expected to soar in the years ahead. How are you preparing now for the growing possibility that it will affect you or someone you know?

15. Does your family and close friends know how you wish to be treated if a disease diminishes your ability to communicate or think clearly? What would have been different if Kim's parents had thoroughly discussed end-of-life issues while her mother could express her feelings and preferences?