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As Close To Us As Breathing: A Novel



Synopsis

A multigenerational family saga about the long-lasting reverberations of one tragic summer by "a wonderful talent [who] should be read widely" (Edward P. Jones). In 1948, a small stretch of the Woodmont, Connecticut shoreline, affectionately named "Bagel Beach," has long been a summer destination for Jewish families. Here sisters Ada, Vivie, and Bec assemble at their beloved family cottage, with children in tow and weekend-only husbands who arrive each Friday in time for the Sabbath meal. During the weekdays, freedom reigns. Ada, the family beauty, relaxes and grows more playful, unimpeded by her rule-driven, religious husband. Vivie, once terribly wronged by her sister, is now the family diplomat and an increasingly inventive chef. Unmarried Bec finds herself forced to choose between the family-centric life she's always known and a passion-filled life with the married man with whom she's had a secret years-long affair. But when a terrible accident occurs on the sisters' watch, a summer of hope and self-discovery transforms into a lifetime of atonement and loss for members of this close-knit clan. Seen through the eyes of Molly, who was twelve years old when she witnessed the accident, this is the story of a tragedy and its aftermath, of expanding lives painfully collapsed. Can Molly, decades after the event, draw from her aunt Bec's hard-won wisdom and free herself from the burden that destroyed so many others? Elizabeth Poliner is a masterful storyteller, a brilliant observer of human nature, and in *As Close to Us as Breathing* she has created an unforgettable meditation on grief, guilt, and the boundaries of identity and love.

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Customer Reviews

The sleepy beach community of Woodmont, Connecticut, is a sanctuary for the Jewish community

that gathers there every summer. Women and children read and rest, cook and play, sail and gossip all week, and then spend their Fridays preparing for the arrival of husbands and fathers and the start of Shabbat, the weekly Sabbath. For the three Syrkin sisters, the family cottage in Woodmont is the most important place --- it's what their father worked so hard for and where they spent every summer of their lives. In 1948, the grown sisters and their families face an unthinkable tragedy that changes them, and the magic of Woodmont, forever. Vivie, Bec and Ada are the focus of Elizabeth Poliner's latest novel, *AS CLOSE TO US AS BREATHING*, and their tale is heartwrenchingly and beautifully told, narrated by Ada's daughter, Molly. In the book's very first sentence, readers are told that in the summer of 1948, Davy Leibritsky, Molly's little brother, is killed in an accident. Poliner slowly reveals the details of the accident and of Davy's death, but more importantly focuses on the emotional fallout. Each member of the family deals with the tragedy in their own way, and several of them are consumed with guilt, though no one is to blame. Davy's passing becomes a turning point, forcing each to consider their relationships and their future. The lives of the Leibritskys, like those of all families, are complicated, and it is the tangles and secrets, desires and dreams of her characters that Poliner gives readers. Molly is an unobtrusive, yet remarkably omniscient, narrator. With the distance of years, she tells the story of her family as it swirls around the summer of 1948 and the devastating loss of Davy.

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