



Our Daily Bread by Lauren B. Davis

About the author:

Lauren B. Davis is the author of the bestselling and critically acclaimed novels *The Stubborn Season*, *The Radiant City* and *Our Daily Bread*, which was longlisted for the 2012 Scotiabank Giller Prize and named as a best book of the year by both *The Globe and Mail* and the *Boston Globe*. Born in Montreal, she now lives in Princeton, New Jersey.

Source: HarperCollins Canada (<http://www.harpercollins.ca>)

About this book:

A novel about what happens when we view our neighbours as "The Other" and the transformative power of unlikely friendships; *Our Daily Bread* is inspired by the true story of the Goler Clan of Nova Scotia.

The God-fearing people of Gideon shun the Erskine Clan, who have lived on North Mountain in poverty, secrecy and isolation, believing their neighbours to be beyond salvation. "That's the mountain," they say. "What do you expect from those people?"

Yet in both groups nearly everyone has secrets and nothing is as it seems.

On the mountain, Albert Erskine dreams of a better and safer life for his younger brothers and sisters. He lives by his code: "You keep your secrets to yourself and you keep your weaknesses a secret and your hurts a secret and your dreams you bury double deep."

April 2016



In town, young Ivy Evans is relentlessly bullied by her classmates. Though her father, Tom, is a well-liked local, his troubled marriage to a restless outsider is a source of gossip. As rumors and innuendo about the Evans family spread, Ivy seeks refuge in Dorothy Carlisle, an independent-minded widow who runs a local antique store.

When Albert ventures down the mountain and seizes on the Evanses' family crisis as an opportunity to befriend Ivy's vulnerable teenage brother, Bobby, he sets in motion a chain of events that changes everything.

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Discussion Questions:

1. *Our Daily Bread* is an examination of what happens when we view our neighbours as “The Other.” Is there anyone considered “The Other” or “one of those people” in your community? What about in your family or at work? How is the us-versus-them struggle in Gideon an emblem of conflict in your country, in the world community and in the human heart?
2. Lauren B. Davis suggests that religious intolerance is a significant contributor to the way the Erskine Clan is treated. Do you think religion brings people together or divides them? Is *Our Daily Bread* a book about specifically Christian issues? Could the story just as easily be set in a Muslim or Jewish or Hindu society?
3. Although the child abuse in the story never happens “on stage,” apart from a brief scene in the first chapter, it haunts the story and has gone on, we learn, for generations. What do you think contributed to this breakdown of the family unit and of societal and moral norms?



4. How do Albert, Bobby and Ivy compare to one another? What do they tell us about growing up? How does role reversal shape them? What traits, responsibilities and fears have they inherited?
5. The townspeople of Gideon can justify not protecting the children of the Erskine clan because they believe the adults' behaviour places the children beyond redemption. Do you agree with this reasoning?
6. Dorothy Carlisle steps in to help the Evans family during a difficult period and to act as a kind of surrogate grandmother to Ivy. Has anyone in your life helped you in this way, or have you ever reached out to someone?
7. Dorothy leaves packages at the Erskine compound and refuses to condemn Albert Erskine, even when the rest of the community vilifies him. Still, she feels she hasn't done enough. What do you think? What more might she have done, or should she not have involved herself?
8. The impetus for change in *Our Daily Bread* comes from the unusual friendships formed between characters, such as Albert and Bobby, or Dorothy and Ivy. Chance encounters, such as Jane's meeting Albert, or Albert's meeting an elderly woman during a break-in, are also agents of transformation. What do you think it is about these meetings that effects change? How do the meetings change the characters' perceptions of themselves and one another?
9. When he befriends Bobby Evans, Albert sees himself as a sort of mentor. What do you think of that relationship? Why does Albert want to be Bobby's friend? And what does Bobby see in Albert?
10. At the end of the book, Dorothy leaves Gideon. Do you think she made the right decision? What would you have done?
11. Albert struggles between wanting to stay on the mountain and protect the younger children and wanting to escape. What would have happened, do you



think—to the clan, to the children and to Albert himself—if he had chosen to leave?

12. How does the reader function as a witness in *Our Daily Bread*? Does this witnessing change the reader? If so, in what way?

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