



SHADOW SISTERS

by Shelley Davidow



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THE STORY

During the terrifying years of Apartheid in South Africa, Shelley Davidow's family was a crime. At a time when it was illegal for black and white people to live together, Shelley's social activist parents took in Rosie, an abandoned black three-year-old. Rosie grew up as a beloved daughter and sister in a white household. Against the backdrop of racist laws and ever-present threats of violence, Shelley's parents did all they could to provide a safe, happy home for their five children. But when Rosie was sixteen, devastating truths came to light, shattering the family's understanding of the past.

In this haunting memoir, Shelley Davidow unravels the memories of her early life, searching for truth and reconciliation. *Shadow Sisters* leaves us with a deeper understanding of family love – but what if, sometimes, love is not enough?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shelley Davidow is the award-winning author of over 40 books. She writes across genres, for adults, teenagers and children. Her recent non-fiction titles include *Whisperings in the Blood*, *Playing with Words*, and *Fail Brilliantly*. She is a lecturer in the School of Education at the University of the Sunshine Coast in Queensland, Australia, and lives near the beach with her family.

DISCUSSION NOTES

- 1) How does Leena's arrival impact the family?
- 2) What prevents Rosie from fully integrating into the family?
- 3) Shelley and Rosie are described by the author as 'shadow sisters'. What are some of the parallels in the lives of the two 'sisters'?
- 4) Describe some of the ways Shelley's social activist parents fought Apartheid. How effective do you think these actions were?
- 5) Author Elizabeth McKenzie writes on the cover of the memoir: 'Shelley Davidow distils the tragedies of a nation down to the relationships within her very home.' In South Africa, the 'personal' was often the 'political'. How did Shelley's personal family life mirror the nation's political tragedies?

University of Queensland Press – Book Club Notes

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- 6) What factors contributed to Shelley developing an eating disorder in her early teens? How does Shelley's perception of her body change over the course of the book? What role does J play in altering this perception?
- 7) 'When we said goodbye this time, we felt our souls connected by filaments that stretched through time and continents, weaving our lives, our stories together...' (p. 221). How does this quote reflect the relationship between Lor and Shelley?
- 8) Why does Shelley feel implicated in the tragedy of Rosie's life? How has she reconciled herself with this by the end of the memoir?
- 9) Shelley's family moves to Australia at the end of the memoir and she learns that Apartheid laws were based on Queensland's Aboriginal Protection Act of 1897. What parallels does she find in contemporary Australian society with her Apartheid experience?
- 10) The narrative suggests along the way that writing a memoir is always a reconstruction of events from an individual point of view. Discuss some of the challenges that an author might face when trying to write a family memoir.

FURTHER READING

Whisperings in the Blood by Shelley Davidow (UQP, 2016)