A Room of Her own is extremely proud to inaugurate our Book Club with Meredith Hall's *Without a Map*, a book "which would not be if it were not for the Gift of Freedom Award I received from AROHO. I am profoundly grateful for AROHO's extraordinary financial support, encouragement, and friendship." (from the acknowledgement of *Without a Map*.) We know you will love it as much as we do. *—Darlene Chandler Bassett, founder and president of AROHO*

Conversation with Meredith Hall, March 21, 2007

Meredith Hall and Mary Johnson first spoke in the spring of 2004 when Mary gave Meredith the news that she had been awarded A Room of Her Own Foundation's Gift of Freedom Award, a $50,000 grant designed to help provide a deserving woman writer with the time and freedom to pursue her art. At the time, Meredith taught writing at the University of New Hampshire and painted houses in the summer. She had published two essays in the literary journal *Creative Nonfiction*, and wanted to expand those essays into a memoir. In her application for the grant, Meredith wrote, "I am compelled to do this writing, am hungry for it. I dream writing, write in the car, write in the shower—but do not have the time or energy to actually do the writing. The AROHO grant will give me the freedom to finally write."

The Gift of Freedom Award allowed Meredith to take a sabbatical from teaching. During those eighteen months of the grant period, Meredith published several additional essays and received both a Pushcart Prize and notable essay recognition in *Best American Essays*. She also received a fellowship from the Maine Arts Commission, was a finalist for the Rona Jaffe Award, and was a resident at the MacDowell Colony and the Jentel Artist Residency Program. Meanwhile, Meredith's work appeared in the *New York Times, Creative Nonfiction, The Southern Review, Five Points, Prairie Schooner,* and several anthologies.

For three years, Mary and Meredith have continued their conversation about writing. Meredith and Mary shared the following conversation by instant message on March 21, 2007, immediately before the public release of *Without a Map.* At that time, *Without a Map* has already been named winner of the 2007 *Elle* Readers' Prize and had been chosen as a *Book Sense* pick.

Mary is a member of AROHO's Board of Directors and is Creative Director of AROHO's Retreats for Women Writers. Mary is also working on her own memoir, about the twenty years in which she lived as a Missionary of Charity, one of the sisters of Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Mary has written a discussion guide for readers of *Without a Map*, which can be used by book clubs or by individual readers, and a study guide which uses *Without a Map* to provoke thought and discussion about good writing.

Mary: Meredith, I want to begin by saying that reading *Without a Map* was a privilege and a deep gift. You've shared yourself so honestly in these pages. As I watched you seeking out and creating meaning from the events of your life, I watched a human being grappling with loss and betrayal to learn freedom, honesty, and love. Thank you.

Meredith: Mary, your response to *Without a Map* has been incredibly generous and receptive. I thank you.

Mary: I'd like to jump right in to talk about your book, because I find it so powerful. The story is about your becoming pregnant when you were sixteen, about your family and community shunning you, and about how you come to terms with all that. It's not just about the events, though those are dramatic enough. For me, an equally important drama in the story comes from your efforts to find meaning in these events. What does it mean for you to make meaning, and why does it matter?

Meredith: You have moved straight into the quote from Charles Simic which has been so powerful a force for me as I write: that we circle our "obsessive images" perpetually, that making meaning is the matter of our existence. As I wrote this book, I found that the stories were simply there, waiting as image, a whole store of them. As I circled those stories, I

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moved more and more deeply into the process which occupies us so constantly: to look back through our lives, to consider the events, the forces, to consider our roles and the roles of the people we have loved, and to create the connections among all the parts. I think, for me, that is the process of coming to acceptance—to discover the connections between all the moments, and for me, that discovery always comes to love, in its frailty and great power. The meaning always lies there. I think we must search, must move toward the calm of understanding. This is a wonderful age—I'm in my fifties now—a time of all the pieces coming together into a whole.

Mary: And you certainly have reached an understanding. The voice in your memoir is strong, honest, and demands our attention. But at sixteen, you were sometimes unable to speak your truth. You were shamed into silence. Could you talk about the process of moving out of silence to develop the powerful voice with which you speak in your memoir?

Meredith: Yes, I was shamed into silence. But my silence during that time is one of the great mysteries I have considered. I learned well as a child of the fifties to be a good girl, acquiescent, undemanding, serving. So I moved into that silence from that education. But I was also an angry girl, already, a girl who made a lot of noise in school, for instance, who spoke up and spoke out. So my silence about giving away my child is a great weight for me. My siblings remember me as a girl who always felt the need to speak the truth at home, who would not let things lie. If that is so, then my silence about my child is especially difficult to carry.

Mary: Yes, very difficult. And I think that the silence also shows how VERY strong the shaming was.

Meredith: The message of shame, of being both contaminated and contaminating was pervasive, powerful, and so insistent, it has taken me decades to recognize it and be able to name it. Silence for all those years is the natural response. I had no idea when I started to write that these stories would come, and certainly had no idea that they would come with such force or certainty. I had not spoken about the events of my young life to any friends over the years. Now I see clearly how powerful—how extraordinarily effective—that message of shame was. And once I started to speak these stories, women started to come out of the air and say, "I had a child. I have never told anyone..." It is quite amazing that such a quiet little message could have such deep and tragic effect.

Mary: In *Without a Map* you write about the 60s—the Hampton Beach riots, the Vietnam War, demonstrations in Cambridge. Yet in the memoir you say that you don't consider what happened to you to be a product of the times. Do you think the setting in time is important? Could this be a story of anytime?

Meredith: I am still not sure what to think about this issue of time. Is there an historic time in which I can imagine sending my daughter away when she needed me most? I can't imagine what social time would be stronger than my devotion and protectiveness of my child. But I gave my child away in that same cultural time—so. Certainly the 50's and 60's were powerful historic times in which to come of age. My life was certainly a reflection of the upheaval of the 60's. The personal and the cultural are deeply linked.

Mary: I'm wondering if you found the writing of *Without a Map* to be "therapeutic." People sometimes speak of writing as a healing process, and in my experience I've often found writing to be very difficult emotionally as well. Could you talk a little about your experience emotionally while writing *Without a Map*?

Meredith: I feel very strongly that if we are seeking therapy, or closure, we need to stick to our journals. That work has to happen before we start to write for readers. I wrote these stories because they pressed outward. They were so ready to be heard, to be spoken out loud, finally. So, no, I do not think that this was therapy. And yes, the writing was very, very difficult—much more difficult than I allowed myself to recognize at the time. I wrote this book in an intense and exhausting several months, and only now look back and understand just what was happening for

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me. Once the words started to come, they boiled—the effect of so much silence for so long. I had the very, very strange experience of feeling as if the stories had already been written, that I simply opened my mouth each morning and the words came, that I was a transcriber. There were places in the book that I stepped in and had to slog over the words as a writer does, but so much of this book erupted complete from some other place because, I think, I have had so many years to consider these events.

Mary: The book does feel like a very intense experience, and the words feel so perfect, with nothing extra. How did you manage with such an intense experience? What was your daily routine like while you were writing?

Meredith: I discovered with this first book that I love—I mean really love—writing. It is delicious, intoxicating. I do not tire. When I received the grant from AROHO I made the very naive but smart decision to leave my house and my world here in the woods of Maine, to remove myself from what I know and love. I lived in a tiny sublet in San Francisco. I woke early, ready for work, so the routine established itself very quickly: at the computer by 8, and then I disappeared. I have come to see this as entering "the tunnel"—I have discovered that I cannot write in short blocks. I must have absolute solitude, disconnection from all people, all requirements of my heart and mind. And in I go. Away, away. I love that place deeply. I would emerge in the late afternoon hungry and suddenly tired, needing the outdoors and people. It would be 4:30 or 5:00. Out into the streets of the city, walking long miles—and eating! Seven days a week I wrote. I am back at my teaching now, and am struggling to find the entrance to that tunnel. It calls every minute of every day.

Mary: I think that might be some of what you mean when in the acknowledgements you thank A Room of Her Own Foundation for "extraordinary financial support, encouragement and friendship," and you claim that the book would not exist without the Gift of Freedom you received from AROHO. Can you talk about how that grant enabled you to enter that writerly place?

Meredith: I recently found several boxes of old letters and papers. I was struck with the persistence of one expressed idea: "I want to write." But I didn't write. I understand so much better now why. The need for that tunnel is not a good habit (it does, in fact, feel like habit!). It requires such perfect solitude and disconnection from the world. I want very much to learn not to need that, because it is nearly impossible to create it. For so many years I was a deeply engaged mother, I worked at a very wonderful and demanding job, and my adopted or surrogate father, lived with my family for eleven years until he died at 95. The writing was a longing, undefined, so persistent. I did not know that I was a writer, only that I wanted to write. Suddenly, I was awarded the Gift of Freedom from AROHO, and every aspect of my life and my sense of myself changed. My children were grown, and suddenly the moment was exactly right for me to discover this release. I am profoundly grateful to AROHO. Darlene Chandler Bassett, AROHO's founder and president, told me once that her greatest hope for me was that my sense of identity would shift, from teacher to writer. It has, in spades. Now this is my life. AROHO carved out a doorway in space for me, and I walked through. Now I am here, a writer.

Mary: Can you talk a little more about that? About what it means for you to be a writer?

Meredith: What it means is a little scary! And a little wonderful. I suddenly see myself as a creative force, a kind of energy waiting for release in expression. That is very new to me. It seems to explain a lot—I have always felt a bit outside, not a good fit in the world. Suddenly it is as if I have come home, come into my own skin. It is an incredibly heady and wonderful and exciting feeling. It is also scary because the identity carries with it a great responsibility to do the work that is waiting.

Mary: We'll talk a little later about work that is waiting, but first I want to ask—You've received such

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terrific endorsements for *Without a Map*, from some of today's most respected authors—Annie Dillard, David James Duncan, Ivan Doig, Lauren Slater. *Without a Map* was chosen Winner of the 2007 *Elle* Readers' Prize, was reviewed by Francine Prose in *O Magazine*, and was chosen as a *Book Sense* pick. What has it been like for you to receive that kind of affirmation and attention, and how did you go about getting those endorsements before your book was published?

Meredith: This is very strange territory for a memoirist. As I wrote this book, I imagined it going out into a quiet and small world of a few, hopefully admiring, readers. It never once crossed my mind—I simply never imagined—that it would be read by a lot of people. It is a very intimate book. As I wrote, I felt as if I was speaking intensely and intimately with one person. This attention has been a surprise. I am not sure yet what to make of it. The endorsements: I wrote letters to the writers I most admire. Several of them wrote back saying that they liked my letter and my book. And working with Beacon Press has been absolutely the most wonderful experience a writer could have. They are so smart, so committed, so skilled, and so incredibly hard-working. Beyond a few letters that I wrote at the manuscript stage, the rest has been Beacon's good work.

Mary: And what about your family's reaction to the book—your brother and sister, your sons? Have you heard from your father? I can only imagine that some of this process must be difficult for them.

Meredith: Ahhhh—this is the hard part of memoir writing. That enormous question: whose story is this? The boundary between what is mine to tell, what has happened to me, quite literally bleeds into the lives of the people I love. My sons have been unfailingly excited and supportive, including Paul who is so exposed in these stories. I have been careful to ask each of them if they are comfortable with what I have written. But it must be very hard for them. And for my sister and brother. We are extremely close, and I feel very protective of them. They have been patient and kind. I worry now about my father, and feel very protective of him, too. I had no idea that the book would become so visible. I had imagined that he simply would not even know it exists. I'm not sure about that now.

Mary: I'm glad your family has been supportive. As for your father, I'm pretty sure he'll come to know. In fact, that leads to one of the things I wanted to talk about.

Your memoir is so searingly honest, but there were two places where you admitted to avoiding the entire truth when speaking with your mother and your father. After your mother's diagnosis with ms, you make the decision that it was too late to confront her with her mistakes. You say, "I will never be able to hold my mother accountable." The same sort of thing happens when you sit with your father in his car in the parking lot outside MacDonald's and you tell him that in the end you believe that only intentions matter, but then you tell the reader that actually you believe that the effects of our actions remain in the world, and that the actions matter very much. As a reader, I got angry because I wanted to hear your parents apologize. I wanted some sort of confession, some sort of reparation, but it was also more than that: I had come to love your imperfect parents, and I felt that in letting your parents off you were denying them the opportunity to face their errors and grow, denying them also, perhaps, a certain release.

At the same time, I sensed that you believed you were behaving compassionately, that it was too late for them, that what they needed now was amnesty, not confrontation. It's all quite complicated. Was this a way of saying, "We all make mistakes"?

Meredith: First, Mary, I have to tell you that I am overjoyed that you came to love my imperfect parents. Exactly.

These questions run to the very heart of this process of making meaning. Let's see. Yes, I felt that it was time for me to learn to love my mother and to love my father in ways that encompassed our pasts, not

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rejected or denied them. They were both old, struggling with the largest and hardest issues, of mortality and what we have made of our lives.

As I say in the book, I felt that my mother had a chance to change things, to right things, and she did not. I felt very angry about that for a long time—as if she enacted the old hurt. It has taken me some time to accept that she just could not confront that past. I felt great compassion for my mother, so strong and capable once, a good mother in so many ways, and imprisoned then in her wheelchair and dying body. It was not a time to demand explanation or apology. I knew she loved me.

My father is different, I guess. He is so fragile. I have come to feel a fierce protectiveness of him, a desire to ease things for him. I believe that my father carries a deep grief about me. I don't want him to.

I think that we roam around in our memories always, and each voyage delivers something new and better, understandings that calm us, and that teach us how to live more fully, more openly, risking more. That teach us about empathy. About being tender toward others and ourselves. Some griefs are simply big, and they will be griefs, maybe, always. But the edge comes off. We hold them differently. Loss carves something big in us. I am very aware of that in my life.

Mary: Yes. I think that is true. Some things are never finished. And, as you say in your book love is never lost. There is so much love in your book, and the pain of love, and of betrayal. The sections about mortality are also very strong. You watched so many of those close to you die—your mom, Ruth, William. I sense that thinking about mortality influenced a fair amount of your writing.

Meredith: I think one of the great gifts that comes with turning fifty is that we become so receptive, so open. I had no idea how good it would be! Yes, I am keenly aware of time.

Mary: And your memoir does cover a lot of time, nearly all your life, and you've done it in 220 pages. A writer always has to make choices: what do I leave in, what do I take out? You've chosen not to mention some obviously important things—for example, the reader never meets your husband, never learns his name, just knows that you are divorcing him. Also, the reader doesn't see you on your return trip through the Middle East and Europe, but just follows you on your trek eastward. How do you make the decisions about what to include and what to leave out?

Meredith: I have been asked this question by many writers and it has surprised me. I don't remember making choices. Those "obsessive images"—they are so clear for me. I just turned my gaze on one and I wrote. Then the next, and I wrote. I did not write this in any order—I just woke to each day and wrote the stories that seemed to be pouring out of me. I sometimes think about writing another memoir, but I am not sure if I have any other stories to tell.

Mary: Yes, your book is a bit like a kaleidoscope, focusing on different images, and watching them reflect off each other, first one, then another. That means that you wrote a fairly nonlinear manuscript—in the sense that you often jump back and forth in time in any given chapter. This seems to have confused some readers, and its' something which other readers have found very appealing. If I understand you correctly, you didn't so much choose to move backward and forward in time, but rather focused on the various images, and then put the pieces together to make a book. Is this right? Which pieces did you write first?

Meredith: Yes, I was not aware of moving in time. I wrote about my mother. About my baby. About my town. About my pregnancy. About my father. I did virtually no revision, simply wrote. One day I felt that I was done. I printed it all out and spread the pieces on my bed in my apartment. I made a list of what I had in front of me, and realized that I should organize the pieces chronologically for clarity. The

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one problematic piece was the one about my father, which was published in the *Fourth Genre* in its entirety as "The River of Light." In the book, I had to break that chapter into three pieces. It covers so much time—I introduced people and events that you don't meet until later. So there was some "mechanical" work that I had to do there to give the narrative cohesion.

Mary: Another aspect of writing a memoir, and one that has received a lot of attention lately, has to do with the nature of truth and memory. You've drawn on your memories to write this memoir. In Chapter Five you write, "These are my memories, filed and cross-filed in my mind. Is this really how it was? I know, and then the flash of doubt." Memory is a tricky thing, but your memoir rings very true. As a reader, I trust you. How did you deal with the issue of truth in writing your story? Did you do much research? Did you talk to members of your family? What did you do when you had reason to question your memories?

Meredith: I feel very responsible to these events. I did a lot of research, checking on small facts to see if the larger personal story I remember fits, makes sense, gibes. I talked a lot with my siblings. I was particularly concerned with the sequence of events, and went over and over what I had written to make sure that I was getting it as right as I could. My wonderful and brilliant editor, Helene Atwan, was very patient with me as I combed through the material again and again, wanting to get it right.

Mary: Meredith, I remember that we once had a discussion in which you said that sometimes you were afraid your story wouldn't be considered important because it talked about women's things. Would you like to share your thoughts about that now?

Meredith: If I said that, I would change its wording now! I do feel that women writers are still defensive about writing these stories—stories about family, about loss and grief, about mortality, identity. Love. In the end, it is, for me, about love. For a baby, for the excruciating beauty and perfection of our planet, for a flawed mother, a flawed self. I do not make apology now for these stories. While I wrote, I imagined a kindly female face bent in close, listening. I dispelled that sense of smallness, of apology, by speaking to that attentive face. Now that the words are on the page, the stories feel valid, and I hope lots of men and women read them and find something in them.

Mary: I love that image of a kind, female face bent in to listen. And I'll never forget, at the AROHO Retreat for Women Writers at Ghost Ranch, how sixty women bent forward from their seats under the stars to hear your story. They were absorbing your words heart to heart as you read them. And women have a special place in *Without a Map*. In the chapter on your wanderings through Europe and the Middle East, you write, "Other women have walked here. Other women, I know, have been alone. I feel a momentary jolt of connection, of steadying order." Finally, it is the moving gesture of a woman which immediately precedes your decision to return home. Do you think that the connection women feel with other women differs from the connection women sometimes feel with men?

Meredith: Maybe because we have no need to make that apology. I think women, especially as we get older, extend great safety to each other. I sense an awareness among women of the effort we each make to live good lives.

Mary: Meredith, do you think you are stronger for having lived "without a map"? People sometimes say that everything happens for a purpose. You don't seem to believe in an outwardly imposed destiny, but you work hard to find meaning. Talk about that a little.

Meredith: I think I was surprised at my own answer in *Without a Map* when I asked, "Would I choose a different life?" No, I would not. I don't think that I have experienced a particularly difficult life. That's why people respond to these stories—because everyone knows loss and grief, and they recognize the story. I have lived an incredible life, a rich and

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varied and deeply rewarding life. I love this life, and am grateful for it. It is very hard to write about joy and fullness. But I would like to. I have a lot of it.

Mary: And what are your next writing projects?

Meredith: I am working on a novel, or rather want to be working on the novel. The grant period is over and I am teaching again. I am trying to learn how to write without needing that tunnel, because I cannot sweep the world away and go down the hole. Instead, I am writing short stories, which I can write in one day, and a day in the tunnel is occasionally available! But the essays keep calling me back. It is a beautiful and demanding form.

Mary: And I hope we get to see many more of them! Finally, Meredith, do you have any advice for people who are writing memoirs?

Meredith: Well, I don't feel like an expert memoir writer. Maybe I could say a few things: Once you have decided to write your life, you must be ready to tell the truth, or don't bother with the writing. And what you think is the truth right now may not be the truth that needs telling. Also, fasten your seatbelt. This is a difficult ride. And, do it. We absolutely must tell our stories to each other in order to know how to live well. People are waiting to hear your stories.

Mary: Thanks, Meredith. This has been fun. So much has happened between our first conversation and now. It all makes me very happy.

Meredith: Yes, it makes me very happy, too. I have such a sense today of how much I have changed since you called three years ago. And you are a wonderful interviewer—I wish that these were the questions people asked. And I suspect that you have spent a great deal of time on the discussion and study guides—your knowledge of the book is so deep. I thank you for that, too.

Mary: I loved studying your book—I learned so much, and the writing is so terrific. I also had the experience of being immersed in another person's struggle to make meaning of pain, loss, and love—and that was a beautiful experience for me.

Meredith: Thank you, Mary.

Mary: Thank you, Meredith.

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Discussion Guide for Readers of Meredith Hall's *Without a Map*

In *Without a Map*, Meredith Hall reflects on the events of her life to find meaning. Readers may find *Without a Map* a useful tool to explore meaning in their own lives.

Relationships: Relationships form some of Meredith's central challenges: relationships with her mother, her father, Catherine, Erik, Paul, Ruth, Armi, William. What are some of the recurring challenges relationships provide? Do any of these relationships resemble your own challenges with relationships?

Protecting: Meredith's parents don't protect her. Meredith doesn't protect her first son, but gives him up. The teachers at High Mowing say, "We must protect the girls." Paul protects Ruth. Meredith protects her two younger sons. As her parents age, Meredith protects them from confrontation with the truth of her past. Is protecting always a good thing? How can you tell the difference?

Survival: When Meredith calls her mother from High Mowing School, looking for sympathy, her mother tells her. "You have no choice. You'll be fine.... You are a survivor." What would you have told Meredith? How does Meredith eventually survive and flourish?

Wild things and domestication: *Without a Map* is full of references to wild things and to domestication, and is something of a struggle to hold both dear. Remember the wild scenes, including the storm at High Mowing, the storm at sea with Erik, Meredith's mother driving out into hurricanes, the demonstrations at Cambridge, the many scenes during Meredith's wanderings through Europe and the Middle East. The scenes of domestication include some of the early home life, the girls at Bennington College, and creating homes out of apartments while with Erik. In some places wildness and domestication are carved into the same scenes: in Newfoundland, while killing chickens, in the homey cabin in Maine's wilderness. What roles do you think the wilderness and domestication play in the unfolding drama of Meredith's life? Do they have roles in your life?

The Sixties: *Without a Map* continually makes reference to the political activities of the 60s—the Hampton Beach riots, the Vietnam War, demonstrations in Cambridge. Yet the narrator says that she doesn't consider what happened to her to be a product of the times. Do you think the setting in time is important? Could this be a story of anytime?

Identity: Meredith's identity is stripped from her when she becomes pregnant and is shunned by her family, her school, her church, and her local community. Chapter Six, "Drawing the Line," deals in particular with identity and the stories we tell ourselves. In the final pages of the book, the author comes to a calm, rooted sense of self. How do you think she achieved that?

Belonging and Loss: The sense of belonging is continually interrupted by losses in Meredith's life: her father leaves home, her mother throws her out, Meredith abandons her baby, church and school and community shun her. Meredith talks of her wanderings in Europe as a search for disconnection and perfect detachment, and says, "My baby is shaped like this hole in me." Paul says, "I am an alien. I belonged to no one." Yet comfort is found in imperfect reunions and in basic biological facts, the sharing of cells and minerals. Meredith finally concludes, "I will return home, part of the world." What is home, and what does it mean to belong?

Love: In the first chapter, Meredith reads *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter.* Meredith's father and Catherine seem to find love in each other. Meredith's mother looks for love in many places. Meredith begs Erik, "Say it." Paul says, "My mother loving me is what saved my life," yet Meredith and Ruth "both understand that love is not enough." Chapter

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Thirteen ends with the words, "We love each other. We need each other. That is our only map." How is love a map? Is love a map in your life?

Women's place: Why were other misfits tolerated, but not the pregnant girl? As young people, Paul stands up to Armi, but Meredith didn't stand up to her father or to her mother. Do you think this has anything to do with gender roles? Are middle-aged women invisible? Is Meredith invisible?

Mothering: We meet many mothers in *Without a Map:* Meredith's mother, Meredith, Catherine, Ruth, the girl who comes to the photocopy shop, the women in the desert. What does *Without a Map* say about being a mother?

Class: Meredith's mother told her, "Don't drag us down." Armi told Paul, "Don't get above your upbringing." The fishermen don't consider Erik as belonging because he is not of their class. Does Meredith's sense of dislocation have anything to do with class?

Forgiveness: Does forgiveness always require words? Is anything lacking in the forgiveness Meredith and her mother offer each other? What about Meredith and her father, Meredith and Paul, Ruth and Paul and Armi?

Death: The latter chapters refer often to death: the death of Meredith's mother, of Ruth, of William, the impending death of Meredith's father. Do you think thoughts about death contribute in any way to the sense of calm that pervades the last chapter?

Study Guide of Meredith Hall's *Without a Map*

This study guide offers springboards for discussion and study of *Without a Map* as an example of good writing. It will help readers consider some of the elements of a writer's craft and may be useful to writers and students.

Style: Hall uses a very spare style throughout this memoir: short sentences, concise words, symbol given preference over metaphor and simile. In what ways is this style appropriate to the story's content? What does this spare style do for the reader?

Authenticity: This memoir rings true. How does Hall achieve this voice of authenticity?

Point of View: Hall chooses to write as an adult looking back over her life, and at the same time she writes her story in the present tense, often inhabiting the point of view of the child or young woman. In a sense, this memoir has a dual point of view, allowing the reader to experience what the young girl felt, and to experience what the adult woman looking back on the same experience feels and thinks. What are the particular effects upon this book of such a dual perspective?

Narrative Structure: *Without a Map*'s organization is basically chronological, with the first chapter, "Shunning," a sort of synopsis which orients the rest of the story. The chapters then begin when Meredith is sixteen and advance the narrative in time, but with frequent leaps forward or back, often arranged more thematically than chronologically. The leaps can seem strange, saving details of Meredith's early life with her mother for relatively late in the book, relating the birth of Paul only when Meredith meets him at age twenty-one, never introducing Ben and Alex's father. What does such a structure achieve? What does it sacrifice?

Images: Every good book contains memorable images, but in a sense this book is built around "a few obsessive images." Even ordinary images carry symbolic meaning. Consider any one of these images

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and how it serves the immediate narrative and the book as a whole:

- the beach monument (8)
- the maple sap (28-31)
- the fallen tree at High Mowing (44)
- the land on the western horizon (95)
- the gradual disrobement in Chapter Seven
- the worn sidewalks in Florence (101)
- the search for a place to sleep (108)
- the sound of the typewriter (121-3)
- killing chickens in Chapter 10
- the glass shards in the neighbor's face (198-9)
- the changing course of the *Dorade* in Chapter Sixteen
- the honeybees in the trailer truck (207-8)
- the abandoned houses of Newfoundland in Chapter Seventeen

Show, don't tell: Beginning writers are often told, "Show, don't tell." Hall shows a lot, but she also tells. For example, she doesn't say, "My face relaxes and thought slips from my mind as I trudge down the center of the sidewalk." She says, "I am at peace here, trudging down the center of the sidewalk" (110). Find other places where Hall "tells," and ask whether the "telling" works and why or why not.

A Reader's Memoir: *Without a Map* often refers to other works of literature: the legend of the River of Lethe, Shakespeare's *Othello,* Swinburne's "The Garden of Proserpine," Carson McCuller's *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter,* Raymond Carver's "Late Fragment," Charles Simic's poetry and essays, and others. Do these references serve the narrative, and if so, how?

Risk Taking: Annie Dillard once said, "One of the few things I know about writing is this: spend it all, shoot it, play it, lose it, all, right away, every time. Anything you do not give freely and abundantly becomes lost to you." Find examples of places where Hall's writing goes deep, takes risks, holds nothing back. Do you take risks, empty the bank, in your own writing?

Meaning Making: *Without a Map* can be considered a memoir of meaning-making. Hall addresses this issue directly at the end of Chapter Five, and Chapter Six follows with the stories Erik and Meredith tell themselves and the value of these stories. What does *Without a Map* as a whole have to say about making meaning of one's life? Does the question of making meaning enter your own storytelling?

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