



RUNNING AWAY TO HOME

Jennifer Wilson

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About the Book: Jennifer Wilson and her family lived a comfortable life in the most middle-American of places: Des Moines, Iowa. And yet they felt disconnected and dissatisfied, one day asking themselves: "Is this The American Dream? Because if it is, it sort of sucks." So they packed up and left the troubled landscape of contemporary America to begin again in the Croatian mountain village of Mrkopalj: land of Jen's ancestors. For months, they lived like locals, from milking the neighbor's cows to desperately seeking the village recipe for bootleg liquor. What they found was much deeper and bigger than themselves.

Discussion Questions

- 1) The book opens with the author fleeing the village of her ancestors, far out of her comfort zone and desperate to return to it. And yet, she does return, and with her family. There are a number of reasons—both conscious and subconscious—for her return. What are they? Have you ever experienced a compulsion to do something terrifically outside your comfort zone? Did you find her move selfish or understandable?
- 2) The author experiences a discomfort with The American Dream, as it looks in modern times. How does she see that dream, and why did she abandon it? What benefit might that have? What do you think The American Dream is today?
- 3) What is *metanoia*? Have you experienced it?
- 4) What was the problem with construction on the family's rooms—and how was it emblematic of Mrkopalj in general?
- 5) The author had a hard time settling in to the village. When was the turning point in her time there? What happened, and how did that catalyst for change affect the rest of the book?
- 6) In the village, drinking is a constant, especially among men, and eventually with the author herself when she states: "With an immediate burn in my belly, I knew I had just been inducted into the village of my ancestors." Were you surprised drinking was so prevalent? Did it put you off, or was it just a cultural difference?



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- 7) Robert really unsettles Jen, but he and Jim click. How are these two men alike? How are they different? Why do you think they connected?
- 8) In some loose way, do you think Robert and Jen represent Croatia and America: their ways of looking at life, ways of doing things (or not), different approaches to life?
- 9) What happened when Robert helped the author and Jim find their ancestral homes? Do you think this helped them connect to the past? To the village itself? To its residents (particularly Robert)?
- 10) The old women of the book served almost as midwives to the ancestral connection for the author—particularly Baka Ana and Zora. Do we have traditions we pass from old to young in our culture? What are they? Or have we left them all behind in lieu of progress?
- 11) How did it affect the family to meet their long-lost relatives? Are Americans really disconnected from our roots and families? What have we lost—and what have we not? Who here has connection to family overseas? How does this affect your family and your life?
- 12) Did you find the family’s simpler life appealing? What would you love to get rid of? Can you imagine your family living so close together for months on end?
- 13) How is the author changed at end of book? Why did Viktor’s question “Which kind of Radošević are you?” particularly affect her?
- 14) What did you know about Croatia and the history of that area before you read this book? What have you learned about Balkan history? What surprised you? The World War II history in the book was particularly harrowing. How has this affected the village? Did you find it odd that the area remained unscathed during the Yugoslavian Wars?

Want to learn more about Jen and her family adventure to Croatia?

Visit www.Jennifer-Wilson.com to watch the video, read the family’s blogs, learn about upcoming events and more!

Or, visit Facebook (Search: “Running Away to Home”) or Twitter (Search: “TravelinFamily”)



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