

FIREFLY LANE

by Kristin Hannah

About the Author

- In Her Own Words

Behind the Novel

- A Trip Down “Memory Lane”
- Kate and Tully’s Letters
- Kristin Hannah and Her Readers
- And more!

Keep on Reading

- Recommended Reading
- Reading Group Questions

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About the Author

In Her Own Words

I was born in Southern California and grew up at the beach, making sand castles and playing in the surf. But my parents were adventurers, and when I was about eight years old, they decided to follow the call of the wild, and thus began the journey to the blue and green majesty of the Pacific Northwest. We headed up the Coast Highway in a VW bus, with my brother and sister and I singing songs and arguing in the back seat—pretty much like all family vacations everywhere, I think. Even as a young girl, I remember being amazed by the towering trees and the blue, blue sky.

I definitely grew up as a Northwest girl. Like Kate and Tully, I went to the University of Washington and studied communications. Afterward, I went on to law school.

It was then, while studying law, that my life was turned on its head. My mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. On one of my daily visits to her hospital bedside, she said the words that would change my life: “I know you think you love the law, but really you’re going to be a writer.”

A writer??? I was at the tail end of seven years of college, poised to be a lawyer, and now my mom was telling me that writing was in my future? I didn’t understand and certainly didn’t believe, but because she did—and because it was a dark time and I was too young and there were questions I didn’t want to face—we began working on a novel together. I still remember that as one of the best times of my life, and even of our relationship. I never got around to writing the book (I mean, I was going to be a lawyer, thank you very much), I had the bar exam to study

“I think the dream of writing was as much my mom’s own as it was her gift to me.”

for. After my mom passed away, I boxed all the research material up and stored it in my closet.

Fate, apparently, considered me a slow learner, because a few years later, when I was married and pregnant with my son, I discovered that pregnancy was not going to be easy for me. At about fourteen weeks, I was put on bedrest by the doctor. Now, I'm not great at math, but let me tell you, that's a long time to lie down.

In no time, I'd read every book in the house and started asking my husband for cereal boxes to read; in short, I was a goner. That's when my darling husband reminded me of the book I'd started with my mom.

And there was everything I needed, right there in my closet. A last great gift from my mother. I pulled out the boxes of research material, dusted them off, and began writing. By the time my son was born, I'd finished a first draft and found an obsession.

All these years later, as I approach the age my mother was when she was diagnosed, I see the magic of it all. I know why she saw the writer's temperament in me, and why she knew me so well. I hope someday to give my son just one piece of advice that good (and to say it only once).

I think the dream of writing was as much my mom's own as it was her gift to me. In a lot of ways I feel I'm writing for both of us. And of all my novels, *Firefly Lane* is the one she would have loved the most.

It is absolutely the most personal of my novels, and as I'm sure is obvious to anyone who has read it, my mother's spirit was always by my side as I was writ-

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*In Her Own
Words*

*“It is, at its
heart, a
profoundly
personal novel.”*

ing. It is not often that I write a novel that has a message above and beyond the story itself. Generally, I strive to entertain my readers; hopefully to make them laugh a little and perhaps cry a little. With *Firefly Lane*, I had a deeper mission as well. I became aware that too many women of my generation didn't know about inflammatory breast cancer and how deadly it can be. I felt I was in a unique position to get the dialogue started, and I've been told by countless readers that this book made them aware of the danger. A few have even been prompted to go to the doctor for a check up. So I guess this is my moment to say that we can all make a difference in the fight for cancer, both by being aware of what's out there and by pledging to help. I personally support Stand Up 2 Cancer (SU2C.org). If every person who read this book sent in five dollars, we could literally make a difference. The older I get, the more I find I want to make a difference. So I'm standing up for my mother, my sister, my cousins, my son, my husband, my friends, and myself.



Behind the Novel

A Trip Down “Memory Lane”

Dear Readers,

I mentioned previously in this material that Firefly Lane would have been my mother’s favorite novel of mine, and here’s why. This book, more than any other I’ve written, hits close to home for me. It is, at its heart, a profoundly personal novel. There are so many correlations to my own life. First and foremost—the clothes. Yes, I remember wearing them all—elephant-leg bell bottoms, tie-dyed T-shirts, Earth shoes, shoulder pads, stirrup pants, leg warmers, and last but not least—polyester. And how about those hairstyles? Each one named after and forever immortalized by the celebrity who made it famous. These were the pictures we brought into our small-town beauty salons and tried religiously to follow: the Marcia Brady center-part, long and straight; the Farrah Fawcett; the Dorothy Hamill (this was for my senior picture, in which I was in soft focus and staring down at a rose); the horrifying asymmetrical (am I the only one who remembers this??); the Linda Evans; and last but by no means least, the Rachel.

Since I went to the University of Washington, I remember a lot of locations used in the book. Anyone interested in a Firefly Lane memory lane tour should try: The Last Exit coffee house (is it even still there?), Kells pub in Pioneer Square, which is still a great time, Starbucks in the Public Market, a ferry ride from Seattle to Bainbridge Island, Goldie’s tavern in the U District, Greek row at the University of Washington (I’m sure you can still find a ton of parties happening there on Saturday nights), and the view of Seattle at night from Rockaway Beach.

As a little treat, I’ve also included some extra pages—extra material, I guess you’d say—from Firefly Lane. They are some of the letters Kate and Tully wrote back

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A Trip Down
“Memory
Lane”

and forth to each other during their high school years in the seventies. This is just a sampling; there are more on KristinHannah.com, as well as my playlist for the novel. And please, once you check out the Web site, stick around and join me on the blog. I love hearing from readers.

Kristin Hannah

Kate and Tully's Letters

Dear Kate,

Your last letter cracked me up. I would have called, but I'm in lockdown again. Got caught smoking a doobie in the girl's bathroom. (Don't tell your mom—I know you won't.) This isn't like that time in the tenth grade. This time I wasn't even doing it. I was just there. That's the thing about Catholic girls' schools—they always expect the worst. When I got home my grandma was PISSED. Anyway, I'm on double restriction which means I can't even use the phone. It is totally bogus but there's nothing I can do. So, write lots and give me all the news that's fit to print. It'll be good practice for our future careers in TV news.

Friends 4 ever

Tully ♥

p.s. Do you think I should go with Talullah for my professional name or make up something intelligent sounding?

Dear Tully,

At least you're doing stuff. Snohomish is the boringest place on Earth. NOTHING ever changes here. That's why everyone still talks about you. My curfew is ten

o'clock, even in the summer. I can't even stay up late enough to watch the Bicentennial celebration. How grody is that? I keep telling my mom she's making me miss history but she just laughs. Man, next year is going to blow chips. I wish you were here. I can't wait 'til we get our dorm room together. It'll rock. We'll party hardy every night.

Mom's calling me down for dinner. Tuna Helper. Again. I'd rather eat my own shoe.

Best Friends 4 ever

Kate

p.s. Do you think I really have a future career in TV news???

Dear Kate—

Last night I snuck out of the house and met up with some SENIOR boys from O'Dea. We saw Wings at the Kingdome. It was the coolest night ever. I wish you'd been there. I know Paul McCartney is old, but he's still a stone cold fox. And Ted Frumm asked me out while they played "Band on the Run." He's the captain of the football team. What should I do???

Will write back soon, good buddy. 10-4.

Friends 4 ever,

Tully ♥

p.s. Of course you have a future in news. We're a team, aren't we? And you're lucky your mom watches out for you. Boys can be real jerks. The Bicentennial shit was pretty lame anyway.

Want to read more letters?
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*Kate and
Tully's Letters*



Kristin Hannah and Her Readers

I have been lucky enough to be able to talk with dozens of book groups around the country, and I can honestly say that I learn something every time I do it. Here are some of the questions that come up often.

Q: What influenced you to want to write a novel about female friendship?

A: The truth is that I'd been longing to read a big, complex, emotional book about friendship for years. I wanted the story of my generation, as seen through the eyes of two women who had managed to stay friends for most of their lives. I kept waiting and waiting for someone else to write it, and I guess I finally got tired of waiting. I figured if I wanted to read it, I'd better write it.

As I've gotten older, I've really begun to see how profoundly important we women are to each other. As I said in the book, men and careers and even children can come and go in our lives, but our friendships are forever. That may sound a little flip, and it is, but there's a real thread of truth in it. Especially when I was maneuvering through the battlefield that comes when you're parenting a teenager... I really needed my friends to keep me laughing. And I wanted to write a kind of valentine to those friends.

Q: Why did you choose Seattle as the setting for *Firefly Lane*?

A: I chose Seattle because it's such a deep part of who I am. I've lived here for most of my life, and I've seen my little corner of the world change and grow. We've gone from a sleepy little REI-clad town to a glittering, dot com urban sprawl. So many of the places from my youth are gone now, and I wanted to remember the physical reminders of those bygone days. One of the best parts of writing this book was

"There's nothing like motherhood to make us reassess how we were as daughters."

remembering what Seattle used to be like. And while Kate and Tully are definitely Northwest girls, I hear from readers all across the country who relate to them. In the end, I really believe that we're all living versions of the same life.

Q: In a way, *Firefly Lane* is as much about mothers and daughters as it is about best friends. How did you use the differing female relationships to further the story?

A: Honestly, I believe that the mother-daughter relationship is magical, complex, transformative, potentially dangerous, and deeply powerful. We all are touched by this relationship and more than that, I believe we're formed by it. There's nothing like motherhood to make us reassess how we were as daughters. Obviously, that's a big part of *Firefly Lane*. Much of how Kate and Tully interact, indeed who they are at their deepest levels, is colored by the differences in how their mothers raised them.

One of my favorite parts of the novel is the circle of Kate's relationship with her mom. First we see her as an angry teenager, slamming the door in her mother's face... and then we see her as a mother, standing on the other side of that door. There's a real symmetry in that, a real reflection of how our lives unfold. I have often wished in the past few years that my mom were here to help me as I raised my own teenage son. As a girl, I thought I knew it all. Now I know I don't know much. And somewhere, my mom is laughing.

Q: A big component of *Firefly Lane* is the dichotomy of choices women face today. How do you balance the competing demands of motherhood and work?

A: I was very lucky to have landed in this career.



*Kristin
Hannah and
Her Readers*

*"I was lucky
to... do
work that
fulfilled me."*

What I love most about it is the opportunity it has afforded me to be both a stay-at-home mom and a working mom. For all the formative years in my son's life, I was able to be there for him—every class party and field trip and sporting event. I was always able to put down my writing and put my son first. Until, of course, he realized how embarrassing I was and begged me to stop putting him first. A moment I well remember coming to with my own mom.

There was a price to be paid for all that flexibility, of course. I couldn't write as fast as a lot of other writers, I couldn't travel to promote the books, and I had to miss a lot of social moments with friends, but in the end, I wouldn't have changed a thing. I was lucky to be able to drop him off at school and then come home and do work that fulfilled me. I feel extremely blessed. What I took away from having a foot in both camps, so to speak, is the knowledge that we women tend to feel that whatever we're doing, it's not quite enough. When I was at school, I sometimes worried that I should have been writing, and when I was writing, I often thought I wasn't "present" enough for my family. It's all a trade-off, I guess. That's one of my major themes in *Firefly Lane*—that we need to accept that we are good enough, that all we can do is our best. The whole supermom/super woman thing is an idea that needs to be retired. We're just women, and while we are super, we don't have super powers.

Q: Are you Kate or Tully?

A: While I would love to say that there's a little bit of Tully in me, I'm definitely more like Kate. I identified with her from the very beginning. Like me, she was a small-town girl who had to get up in the predawn hours to go feed her horses, who read *The Lord of the Rings* during every family camping trip,

and who felt lost amid the masses at the sprawling University of Washington. All of that was me, to a great extent; thus, the problem in this book was for me to distance myself from Kate, to see her with some perspective.

Tully was much more problematic to write. I had a really difficult time understanding her. It took me a long time to get a handle on the way abandonment had shaped her. The truth is that I fell in love with Tully. I loved her ambition, her heart, her oversized desires and impossible dreams; I also felt sorry for her. She was so broken by her mother that for all of her grandiose ideas, she could never truly love herself, and therefore, she couldn't love or be loved by anyone else. Except Kate, who saw through all the drama and defenses and loved Tully anyway. And isn't that what a lasting friendship is about?

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about your next book?

A: My next novel, *True Colors* (turn to page 501 for an exclusive sneak peek!), is a complex, poignant portrait of a family in crisis. It's about sisters, betrayal, vengeance, sibling rivalry, honor, honesty, and ultimately what it means to be a family. Raised on a small horse farm in the Pacific Northwest, the Grey sisters have always been close. There's Winona, who has struggled with her weight for years, and yearns for her father's approval; and Vivi Ann, the beautiful, bright-eyed romantic for whom everything comes easily, her father's love most of all; and Aurora, the level-headed middle sister who sees everything too clearly. For years, the sisters have banded together against the cold, distant father who demands everything and gives nothing in return, but when impetuous Vivi Ann follows her heart, events are set in motion that will shake their family to its very foundation. Lies will be told,



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*"I have met
great women
from all over
the country."*

hearts will be broken, and a man's life will hang in the balance.

I have to say I really adore the characters in this book. It's a big, dramatic story that's part family drama, part legal thriller, part love story, and altogether compelling. I don't think you'll be able to put it down once you pick it up. Enjoy!

And one last note:

I have to admit that I came late to the whole Internet party. I was dragged kicking and screaming into the new millennium. With great reluctance (and more than a bit of whining), I updated my Web site and set about the task of blogging.

Who would have thought I'd enjoy it??? You could have knocked me over with a feather.

Another opportunity that has arisen out of the Web site has been the ability to "talk" to book groups (via speakerphone) during their meetings. It has been an absolute blast. I have met great women from all over the country—many of whom remember dancing to ABBA and dreaming about David Cassidy and drinking Boone's Farm. We talk about all kinds of things—writing, reading, the books themselves, and what it's like to be writer. So if you belong to a book group and you've chosen *Firefly Lane*, please jump on board the Web site and tell me you'd like to set up a book club phone chat with me. I can't promise to fulfill all the requests, but I will certainly do my best.

Thanks!

 *Recommended Reading*

This is the fun part—getting to recommend books and tell you why I think you should be reading them. The only problem, of course, is that there are so many wonderful books out there and we all have only so much time. Still... here goes:

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee. Okay, okay, I know it's a no-brainer. But I honestly believe this is one of the best novels ever written. I love the prose, the characters, and the message. On top of all that, it's a story you can't put down.

The Prince of Tides by Pat Conroy. What can I say about this one that hasn't been said? Conroy is truly one of our greatest American writers. I love the lyricism of his voice and the poetry of his thoughts.

The Shadow of the Wind by Carlos Ruiz Zafón. Love, love, love this story. Gorgeous imagery, beautiful language, compelling characterizations, and a story that hooked me from page one. You can't do better than that.

It, *The Stand*, and *The Shining* by Stephen King. I'm a real fan of King's. I could have listed several more titles, but I figure that anyone who hasn't read him can start with these three and be hooked for good. The man just rocks the written word.

As I Lay Dying by William Faulkner. This is my favorite Faulkner novel, and that's really saying something. I love the way the beautiful language contrasts with the dark, gritty reality of the story. Also loved *The Sound and the Fury*, btw...

Turtle Moon by Alice Hoffman. This book just really resonated with me. Also, it was my first Alice Hoffman book. Her voice is absolutely beautiful and unlike anyone else's.

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Middlemarch by George Eliot. I just read this recently—somehow I missed it in college, and although it took a while to get into it, once this story hooked me, it hooked me big time. Like Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, this novel is a substantial investment of time, but well worth the effort.

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows by J. K. Rowling. Obviously, when I chose this book, I mean the whole of the series. I loved every segment of Harry's journey, but the final novel knocked my socks off. As a reader, I was captivated and saddened and elated; as a writer, I was awed and humbled. I can't recommend these books highly enough.

The Lord of the Rings by J. R. R. Tolkien. The novel of my youth, period. You'll see it play a part in *Firefly Lane*, particularly because of its impact on me.

One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel García Márquez. This is simply a beautiful, mesmerizing, original novel—and there's nothing simple about any of that.

The Witching Hour and *Interview with the Vampire* by Anne Rice. Fabulously conceived, beautifully written, and ultimately compelling, these are my favorite two Rice books.

Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare. No list of must-reads is complete without the ultimate word-smith. This is my favorite.

 *Reading Group Questions*

1. One of the first things Tully says to Kate is a lie. Indeed, Tully is quick to lie throughout her life. Do you think this trait is her way of hiding the shames in her past or is it a willful reinterpretation of self? Do these lies and manipulations, big and small, help her ultimately to be more honest about who she is or do they undermine her ability to face her own shortcomings?
2. From her earliest memory, Tully feels abandoned by her mother and father. How does this sense of being unwanted influence her life? How does her troubled relationship with her mother lead to the decisions she makes in her life? Do children have an obligation of some kind to forgive their parents, even in the face of repeated disappointment? How much do you think childhood heartaches make us who we are?
3. The Kate-Johnny-Tully triangle is one of the central threads of the novel. How does Johnny really feel about Tully? How does Tully feel about him?
4. Kate believes she is Johnny's second choice for love. How does Johnny contribute to her insecurities? How does Tully? How much of a relationship is set in the beginning and how are changes made as we grow?
5. When Chad leaves Tully, she rationalizes away her broken heart by saying, "if he really loved me, he would wait for me." What does this reveal about Tully's perception of romantic love? How do these perceptions set the stage for the rest of her life? Do you believe that Tully will ever fall in love?

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6. Near the end of the novel, when their friendship is on the rocks, both women feel wronged. Certainly Kate has ample reason to feel betrayed, but what about Tully's similar belief? Do you understand why Tully was upset, too? Do you believe that a friend should always reach out, even when great pain has been caused? Or do you believe that true friends would never hurt each other?
7. Kate is continually striving to live up to the "supermom" ideal, and continually feels that she has failed in this attempt. Do you think she has succeeded or failed? Discuss the idealized vision society has set up for both working moms and at-home moms. Who do you think has the harder road, and how can women best balance the various responsibilities of their lives? Kate often felt that society discounted her choice to be a stay-at-home mom, and that even her family wanted her to somehow "do more" or "be more." Do you think she was right or wrong to feel this way?
8. At which moment in the novel did you first notice a hint of tension between Tully and Kate? Who do you feel was to blame for this turning point?

10. What do you feel Kate was most jealous about with regards to Tully? And what was Tully the most envious of in Kate's life? Jealousy is often wanting what we cannot have. Do you feel that these characters truly could not have the things they wanted? If not, why not?
11. Under what circumstances do you feel a betrayal is unforgivable? Do you feel that any of these characters crossed that line?
12. What role do you see Tully playing in Mara's life, after the pages of the novel are closed? Johnny's life?
13. In the end, Kate comes full circle in her life and accepts the choices she has made, and in fact, discovers that she would do it all over again. She is fully at peace with who she is for perhaps the first time. How is this acceptance a gift to her children, her husband, and her best friend? And where do you think Tully ends up in terms of her own self worth? How will Kate's illness change her life?

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