



Our Souls at Night

Kent Haruf



Book Club Discussion Notes

Author Background

Before becoming an acclaimed writer, Kent Haruf worked in a variety of places, including a chicken farm, a construction site, a rehabilitation hospital, a library, a high school and as an English teacher in Turkey as a member of the Peace Corps. He gained his Bachelor of Arts (BA) from Nebraska Wesleyan University in 1965 and earned a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) from the esteemed Iowa Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa in 1973.

Haruf was 41 years old before he published his first novel, *The Tie That Binds* (1984). Following this award-winning novel came *Where You Once Belonged* (1990), *Plainsong* (1999), *Eventide* (2004) and *Benediction* (2014). *Our Souls at Night*, published in 2015, was his last novel and has been adapted for the screen, starring Jane Fonda and Robert Redford.

He wrote three of his books on an old-fashioned manual typewriter in his backyard shed. It was his style to always type with his eyes closed. He said this allowed his imagination to create quiet moving stories of the rural fictional town of Holt, in eastern Colorado, a town inspired by Yuma, Colorado, one of Haruf's residences in the early 1980s.

Book Summary

In the familiar setting of Holt, Colorado, home to all of Kent Haruf's fiction, Addie Moore pays an unexpected visit to a neighbour, Louis Waters.

Her husband died years ago, as did his wife, and in such a small town they naturally have known of each other for decades; in fact, Addie was quite fond of Louis's wife. His daughter lives hours away in Colorado Springs, her son even farther away in Grand Junction, and Addie and Louis have long been living alone in houses now empty of family, the nights so terribly lonely, especially with no one to talk with.

A spare yet eloquent, bittersweet yet inspiring story of a man and a woman who, in advanced age, come together to wrestle with the events of their lives and their hopes for the imminent future.

Anne Susskind, Sydney Morning Herald, says of Haruf's last novel, "There is so much wisdom in this beautifully pared-back and gentle book...[A] small, quiet gem, written in English so plain that it sparkles."

Discussion Questions

- ❖ What does the title mean?
- ❖ Kent Haruf was known for using simple, spare language to create stories of great depth. How does the modest action in *Our Souls at Night* open onto larger insights about getting older?
- ❖ It takes a considerable amount of courage for a woman of Addie's generation to invite a man she hardly knows to sleep in her bed. What do you think propelled her to do it?
- ❖ Both Louis and Addie must contend with gossip about their relationship. Who handles it better?
- ❖ Addie and Louis both had troubled marriages but stayed married until their partners died. How does that sense of propriety, of loyalty, influence their relationship with each other?
- ❖ Why did Addie refuse to move after Connie's death? How did this decision colour Gene's reaction to his mother's late-in-life love affair?
- ❖ How does Jamie's arrival deepen the connection between Addie and Louis?
- ❖ Addie and Louis both have regrets about the way they raised their children. How does that influence their relationship with Jamie?
- ❖ Several times during the novel, Addie is described as brave, but she gives in to Gene's demands. Is this a brave act? What is she protecting?
- ❖ How would you describe the ending—as heartbreaking, hopeful, or something else?

References

- ❖ ABC The Book Club – Our Souls at Night: <https://www.abc.net.au/tv/firsttuesday/s4511198.htm>
- ❖ Our Souls at Night (Haruf): <https://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/fiction/10327-our-souls-at-night-haruf?start=3>
- ❖ Kent Haruf: The Final Interview 24 Nov 2014: <https://www.moorejohn.com/portfolio/kent-haruf-the-final-interview/>