

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR *SAVING LAUREL SPRINGS*

From Lin Stepp

1. Why is Rhea Dean not glad to learn from her friend Jeannie that Carter Layman is coming back to Laurel Springs for a visit? What happened in the past to end their relationship?
2. What brings Carter Layman from California back to Laurel Springs? Who does he bring with him? How does Carter's first meeting with Rhea go? What did you learn about Carter's feelings for Rhea as they meet again?
3. The main setting for this book is the *Laurel Springs Camp Assembly Grounds*—a vacation retreat center since the early 1900s in the Cosby, Tennessee area at the base of the Smoky Mountains National Park. Who established Laurel Springs in its earliest days? How has it changed over the years? What old dream did Rhea and Carter once share about Laurel Springs? Many similar resorts to Laurel Springs were established around the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Have you ever visited one?
4. The Deans and the Layman family share ownership of Laurel Springs and both have homes on the property. Share your impressions of these families ... of Wes and Mary Jane Layman and Grandpa Layman – and of Lillian and Nana Dean. What different roles has each family played at Laurel Springs? How has the breach in relationship between Rhea and Carter affected these families? How is Carter received when he first visits at the Deans?
5. Carter tells Rhea, “We don't always get what we want.” What did Carter want that he didn't get? What took him to California and what caused him to stay? At the end of Chapter 3, Carter tells Rhea two reasons why he came back to Laurel Springs. What were those reasons?
6. Both Rhea and Carter bear resentments toward each other about their break-up. Carter is angry Rhea didn't come out to California with him as planned. Rhea is angry that Carter doesn't understand why she didn't come. What reasons does she give for not going to California? Later, as the book unfolds, what other admissions does Rhea confess about not wanting to go to California?
7. There are always special memories between long-time close friends who have grown up together. What memories begin to surface in the scene at the covered bridge, at Rocky Knob on the mountain, and as both remember past times swimming to the raft, dancing at the gazebo and climbing into each others windows? How do these and other recurring memories make it harder for Rhea to keep Carter at a safe distance?
8. Old words of goodbye that Carter and Rhea always shared - “See ya later and love you forever” - surface early in the book and play their way throughout the story.

How does Rhea respond to these words when she first hears them? When is the only time in the book that you hear Rhea say these words?

9. Judith Morgan was already ill when she began to pursue Carter Layman in California. What disease did Judith have? How did it affect her before she died? As the book progresses, you learn more about Judith and Carter's marriage. Why did they marry? What did you think about Judith and her father Morgan Benton? How did they use their wealth and position to influence Carter's life? What concessions for himself did Carter insist on in their agreement?

10. Past friends play a strong role in this book, like Billy Wade and Jeannie Ledford, long time friends of Carter's and Rhea's. What did you like about these characters? How were they good friends to Carter and Rhea? Do you have long-time friends in your life like these? How have they been a help to you in difficult times?

11. Rhea is seeing Marshall Sutton as the story begins, and Marshall has already expressed a desire to marry Rhea. What is Rhea and Marshall's relationship like? What do Jeannie and Billy Wade think about Marshall? How does Carter respond when he meets Marshall again?

12. As Carter begins to use his wealth to revitalize Laurel Springs, Rhea has very mixed feelings about the changes. Why isn't she thrilled to see these changes she's longed for? Why does seeing Carter's new house on the old Costner cabin site cause her to cry?

13. Why does Rhea have a difficult time at first accepting Carter's son Taylor? How does their relationship change with time? How does the hike to Hen Wallow Falls and the cookout help change Rhea's feelings toward Taylor? What does Taylor give to Rhea at a later time in the book that changes her feelings toward Carter?

14. Laurel Springs is having trouble with Vandalism in the book. As the book progresses, what do you discover is behind the vandalism? Who is perpetuating it? How does Carter get hurt by the vandal at the Costner ruins and what happens to threaten Taylor at the old Sutton cabin? How do Carter and Rhea both find themselves in a dangerous predicament because of the vandal?

15. When he is hurt Carter admits to his grandfather that he has let his faith slide. What counsel and help does Grandpa Layman give him? How does he counsel Rhea in a similar way later in the book? Have you had situations in your life when you've found it hard to forgive someone for a wrong, or to forgive yourself for mistakes you've made? How did you move on and who helped you as you did?

16. Carter creates games for Quest, an interest started as a boy, and he has become very successful with his career. What does Carter learn—with surprise—that Rhea is doing as a side career besides working at Laurel Springs?

17. Rhea fights and fights not to allow herself to love Carter again. As she tells her grandmother, "I don't want to be a second chance or a second choice." How does their enforced night together in the cave beneath the Sutton cabin help her to understand Carter's actions better? Yet, Rhea still refuses to marry Carter after this night or to let go of her old hurts. When Carter plans to return to California in disappointment, what events turn Rhea around? What happens when Rhea goes to find Carter at Rocky Knob before he plans to leave? How did you like the closing scene?

18. Of the main and side characters in this book, which ones did you like best? What did you enjoy most about this book? Do you wish you could stay at a place like Laurel Springs?