

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS for *Downsizing*

1. This book begins on a normal, ordinary day when Mary Pat's husband Russell drops by their home at mid-day unexpectedly. She's surprised to see him and can tell he's uncomfortable about something. What does she imagine might be troubling him? What does she learn is really the problem? What reasons does Russell cite for wanting a divorce? What other shocks does this meeting bring to Mary Pat? Do you think Russell was kind? How did Mary Pat react and what did she do after Russell left?
2. Mary Pat also learns she is losing her home as well as her marriage. How would this make you feel? What other disappointments does Mary Pat experience in relation to her friends and social groups, and in her relationships with her children as word of the divorce gets out? Have you ever experienced a difficult time in your life and been disappointed in how others changed toward you because of it?
3. With emotions overwhelming her, Mary Pat runs to her family's old home outside of Gatlinburg in the Glades. What is this home like in comparison to her house in Knoxville? Why did she and Russell own this home? What reasons cause Mary Pat to decide to stay at this house for a time in the Smokies? Have you ever driven through the Glades Arts and Crafts Community and stopped to visit at the stores, shops, galleries, and restaurants there? What do you remember about it?
4. An old saying says: "Old friends are the best friends." Owen McCarter, a neighbor and old friend of Mary Pat's and her family, came back to the Glades after retiring from the military. How is Owen a friend to Mary Pat the first night she arrives? What did you learn about their childhood, former relationship, and about Owen's life since he left? Do you think Owen's past marital sorrows helped him better understand Mary Pat's problems? Do you think people have more empathy and understanding to others problems when they've experienced similar ones?
5. Owen works in the family business McCarter Woodcrafts. As the story moves along, you meet others in his family who work in the business, too—his father Duggan, his sister Francine, a cousin Noble McCarter, Wheeler and his mother Maydeen Ellis. What losses have each of these characters known? What special problems does Wheeler have? How does Wheeler later inadvertently "spill the beans" about an interest forming between Francine and Owen's friend Clint Dawson? What are some of the things you liked about Wheeler in the story?
6. As Mary Pat and her mother talk about disappointments that Mary Pat has faced with friends, neighbors, and groups, her mother asks, "What about your church friends?" How does Mary Pat answer? How has she found the response of her church friends and minister disappointing? Do you think people hold a greater expectation that church friends will be more of a support in hard times than others? Why? What did you think of Mary Pat's mother's counsel: "Well, don't blame God for it ... He is always faithful, and He still loves

you. Reach out to Him and He will be right there?" Have you found that to be true for yourself in times of trouble?

7. Russell claims a divorce won't impact his and Mary Pat's children negatively because they are grown now. Do you think he's right that divorce is easier to accept for older children? What does Mary Pat tell him? How did the children, Todd, Craig, Patrick, and Victoria, act after learning the news? How did their feelings change over time and why? In what ways did they later show their support for their mother more than they did earlier? What did you learn about these children as the book progressed? How do you think your children would handle a divorce or hardship you might endure?

8. Trying to cheer herself after some time has passed, Mary Pat decides to go shopping in the Arts and Crafts community and out to lunch. What happens at the restaurant where she eats that upsets her? When she almost has a wreck trying to drive home after, and pulls off the road, what business does she see? Even though the Diet Options business is closed, what does the owner Charlotte Hillen do when she sees Mary Pat is upset? Charlotte tells Mary Pat that even though we can't change some situations in our lives there are others we can change. She adds: "What is empowering is recognizing the areas in our lives that we can change if we want to and then having the courage and determination to do so." Do you agree? What sorrows does Charlotte confide that she's known?

9. In writing this book, I needed to create both a "fictitious business" and a "fictitious diet" for Mary Pat. I drew on research and personal experiences in creating the business and used a diet plan I'd developed and used successfully to lose weight. Fans and friends who knew me began to encourage me to put the diet in the back of the book. So pieces of Mary Pat's "Diet Options Notebook" and the diet she followed are included in the back of this book. Did you find it interesting to see more about Mary Pat's diet included? Most successful diets involve three things: eating less, eating more of the right things, and moving more. How did you see all three of these factors playing out in Mary Pat's weight loss efforts? Have you ever participated in a weight loss program to help you lose weight?

10. Mary Pat and Owen were sweethearts in high school, and their old relationship begins to resurface in this book. What broke them up and caused them to meet and marry other people? How does their relationship gradually develop over time, despite their reluctance to acknowledge and pursue it? At the Buckhorn Inn, much later, what does Owen confide to Mary Pat about his feelings, even knowing the time isn't right for their relationship to develop further? Many months later, when they share a first kiss, how does it surprise them? As more time moves on, Owen lets Mary Pat know on a hike they take together that he'd like to marry her. How does she respond? How are the roadblocks between Owen and Mary Pat finally resolved?

11. Along with reuniting with Owen, Mary Pat reunites with two former school friends, Nancy Sue Richardson and Gloria Oliver. What is their shared past? While Gloria is somewhat outspoken, Nancy Sue is more warm and nurturing, yet both women have their strengths. What did you enjoy most about Nancy Sue? Do you have friends that are very

different from each like this? Do you still have friends from your school days among your many friendships today? What lessons about friendship did this book suggest to you?

12. What brings Mary Pat's daughter Victoria unexpectedly to the mountains? What upsetting thing has happened in her life? Victoria and Mary Pat's relationship has grown somewhat problematic over the years. Why? How did this time bring them closer together again? How do both Owen and Nancy Sue play a part in helping Victoria? Where does Victoria meet Brock and how does that begin to change her future?

13. Bears play a big role in this story—as they do around the Great Smoky Mountains. What “bear-scare” happens to Mary Pat early in the book? What reasons does the ranger give for the bear, ole Blaze, becoming a problem? When Victoria goes missing later in the story, what part did bears play in this incident? What happens in a third bear encounter at the church when a group of women are unloading baked goods for an upcoming church sale? What problems did the bear cause in this situation? How was the ongoing issue with ole Blaze resolved by the rangers in this scene? Did you learn a lot about bears in this story, like what to do if you encounter a bear, the reasons bears become a problem in the park, or how people can avoid creating difficulties for bears?

14. Russell Latham gets involved with Cherise Levene long before he asks Mary Pat for a divorce, and the two plan a wedding for almost immediately after the divorce is finalized. Just before the wedding date, Russell calls Mary Pat, angry at her and his children. Why? What does she tell him when he expects her to jump in and resolve ongoing difficulties with his children? How does a later call from her son Todd let Mary Pat know that the children are not happy with their father's behavior? What do they want to do on Easter weekend when their father is being married? As the book progresses, Russell Latham realizes he has made a mistake in marrying Cherise. When he says he regrets his divorce and tells Mary Pat he'd like for them to get back together, how does she respond?

15. The romance of Owen's sister Francine with his friend Clint Dawson encounters some difficulties getting off the ground. Why? What does Owen tell Francine about some issues he thinks might be slowing the relationship from developing? What does Francine do to turn things around? When Francine worries about leaving her father alone in his home, but doesn't want to live permanently in Clint's rustic cabin, what resolution does Owen help her come up with? Did you enjoy getting to know Francine, Clint, and Larissa in this story?

16. The young architect, Garrett, working for Cooper Garrison's company building Francine and Clint's new home, ends up having a surprising link to Owen's family. What is that link? What does Garrett tell Owen that shocks him about their relationship? What did you think about Garrett's mother Joanna for her part in this past? Ongoing events throughout this story show that family relationships are often complicated and filled with problems but that family is still important and meaningful. Do you agree?

17. A theme in this book, and a quote Mary Pat puts on her refrigerator is: *Today is the first day on the road to a New You*. Despite the hurts and betrayals she's faced, how does Mary Pat begin to build a new life? Reaching back to old goals, she decides to go back to school to

update her educational and work credentials. What does she want to do? At a later point in the book, what part-time job offer does Charlotte Hillen make to Mary Pat? Is she excited about it? Does she take the job? How is this a benefit to both Mary Pat and Charlotte? When people go through difficult times, they can let those times make them bitter and cause them to stagnate in life or they can push to make a new life. In what ways did you admire how Mary Pat handled all the hardship that came her way?

18. Just as Mary Pat's story seems to be moving toward a happy ending, Russell Latham is murdered, and at first Mary Pat is a suspect. Why? How was Russell killed? How does Owen help Mary Pat and Victoria in this difficult time? As the police begin to investigate, who is arrested for the murder? What was the motive behind the murder? Later, after Christmas, when Mary Pat's family is home again for the holiday, she and Owen are married in a small service at the Glades Community Church. What was their wedding like? Did you enjoy this happy ending for Owen and Mary Pat who had both known so many life sorrows?