

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS  
*For Eight At The Lake*

1. This book begins in the midst of Hurricane Michael, an actual hurricane that hit Mexico Beach, Florida, in October of 2018. It was an unprecedented Category 5 hurricane in the Panhandle region and caused catastrophic damage. Do you remember reading or hearing about that storm on the news? Do you know anyone who was impacted by that severe hurricane or have you ever been in a hurricane yourself?
2. What job does Samantha King have as the book begins? What was she doing at Mexico Beach, Florida? What happens to her as the hurricane hits? What were her injuries? When she wakes from a nightmare remembering the hurricane, where is she? Why is she at her Aunt Dixie's at this time? How does she feel about being forced to take a break for her health to strengthen?
3. Dixie, Samantha King's aunt, owns the historic Dandridge Inn in the small town of Dandridge, Tennessee, on Douglas Lake. Have you ever been to Dandridge? What do you remember about it? What did you learn about Aunt Dixie's inn and its history? What part did Dixie, and the inn, play in Samantha's life growing up? When did Samantha and her sister Andrea come to live with Aunt Dixie and why? What did you learn about Samantha's sister Andrea and her family? And about Aunt Dixie's husband Jackson?
4. Knowing that Samantha will be staying for a time in Dandridge to recuperate, Aunt Dixie encourages her to spend time with her sister Andrea's children to get to know them better. How does Samantha first react to that idea and how did Dixie respond? What do you learn about the children and about Aunt Dixie's role in their lives? How many children did Andrea and her husband Adam Bradley have?
5. Samantha's nieces and nephews, Madison, Andrew, Wesley, and Tamela Bradley, all live with Ford McDaniel, a local Dandridge veterinarian and part owner of the Sycamore Lake Resort. How did Ford and his wife Laura end up taking in Andrea and Adam's children? How many children did they have of their own at that time? What do you remember about the McDaniel children, Natalie, Clay, Gareth, and Rebecca? What happened to Ford's wife Laura three years after taking in the Bradley children? How has Ford managed in this difficult situation, as a working parent with eight children?
6. How did Juanita Helton become a needed help to Ford after he lost his wife? How does Juanita act toward Samantha when they first meet? Why does she act this way? Did you think Juanita's views about Samantha were justified? Does their relationship improve over time? What event much later in the book turns the tide, at least somewhat, in Juanita and Samantha's relationship?
7. In the early chapters of the book, what do you learn about Ford's veterinary clinic, his associates, and the Sycamore Lake Resort where he, the children, and his parents, live? What do you think of Ford? Is he the kind of vet you'd like to take your pet to? As you see

him interacting with the children later, do you think he's a good parent? How do Ford and Samantha meet in the book? Why does Samantha come to Ford's veterinary clinic, mad and upset? Does Ford recognize her? When had he last seen Samantha? Why has Ford felt somewhat resentful toward Samantha over the years?

8. Even though Ford and Juanita, and even Ford's parents, Burl and Coralee McDaniel, have mixed views about Samantha, all the children seem to take to her and like her right away. Why do you think that is? What characteristics does Samantha have that attract the children?

9. Who is Lucy Newberry Howard? How long have she and Samantha been friends and where does Lucy live now? What is her business called in downtown Dandridge? What do you learn about their friendship as they visit and catch up? What does Lucy tell Samantha about her niece Madison that troubles her? How does Samantha get involved later with this situation between Madison and Michael Denby? Did you think she handled the situation well when Madison went missing?

10. On the way back from her visit with Lucy, Samantha also runs into another old friend Paulette Everett. How does Samantha know Paulette? What has happened between Paulette and her husband Jimmy? How does Paulette later play into an ongoing series of criminal mysteries going on in Dandridge, related to the Sycamore Lake Resort?

11. Early in the book, when Juanita's mother has an accident, leaving Ford in the lurch for someone to take care of the kids and his home, what does Samantha offer? Why does Ford hesitate to say yes? What new feelings are going on at this point between Ford and Samantha? Dwayne, who works with Ford, is one of the first to notice Ford's interest but others soon notice, including Samantha. When does this new "interest" between Samantha and Ford first erupt into a romantic scene? What part does one of Ford's signs "What Happens at the Lake Stays at the Lake" play into this scene? How did one of Ford's signs also inspire the book's title?

12. Friends are a blessing in many ways. Vickie and Ben Larsen are two of Ford's best friends, and Vickie becomes a good friend to Samantha. What does Vickie share about her life and her faith that makes Samantha think more about her own faith? What does Vickie also tell her about Ford's faith? Do you think Ford's faith helped him with the problems and losses he faced in his life? Do you think a strong, rich faith can change how a person sees their life and lives it?

13. As Samantha gets to know the children and begins to build love and affection toward them, you—as a reader—probably do, too. What are some of the memories you have about the individual children and their characteristics? How are they different and unique? Which child do you remember most fondly? What system has Ford used with the children that helps with the challenges of raising eight children? Do you like how he handles problems with them? Have you ever used any of his child-rearing rules in your family?

14. About midway through the book, Ford's father pounds on Ford's door one afternoon to tell him one of their employees, Maury Beck, has found a dead woman in one of their resort cabins. What happened to her? How do Ford's dogs Gracie and Jefferson get involved in another murder scene at the resort? What happened to Jefferson in that situation? Even after two murders, the police can't seem to find any leads, leaving everyone anxious over the situation. When Paulette Everett calls Dixie and Samantha, worried someone might be hanging around the event lodge where she's setting up for a party, what does Samantha do? When she gets to the lodge, what does she find and what action does she take? Later, what do you learn is the link between the murdered women?

15. Samantha's work as a weather chaser has trained her to act quickly in emergency situations. How does Samantha's quick thinking later in the book help to save Ford's father Burl in a storm? How, also, does Samantha's quick actions save Juanita's grandson from drowning? Do you admire this attribute in her? In what ways was Samantha even somewhat impulsive in romantic situations? Would you describe yourself as more impulsive or cautious in nature? How can both attributes be good?

16. A favorite pastime for Ford and the children is camping. Ford invites Samantha to go camping with them to the Cosby Campground. Have you ever been camping and do you and your family still like to camp? How does Samantha help to entertain the children on that trip? Spending so much time together brings Ford and Samantha's feelings for each other more to the forefront. What happens? Why does Ford tell Samantha that despite his attraction for her, that he will work hard not to let their relationship develop further?

17. As Samantha finds her own feelings for Ford deepening, she finds herself in a dilemma between her work and her draw to Ford. Why is this especially a problem and a challenge for her? What scene with her own father, Robert King, helps her emotionally to see her way clearer? How does an old friend, Matt Glenn, at the University of Tennessee also help her with this problem by opening a possible door for another position later? Why does Samantha not tell anyone she is even considering a change even when the possibility of a new job is there? Back on the job with Weather First later, preparing to cover an incoming storm, how does yet another friend and associate, and a potter she meets in a shop in Southport, North Carolina, help Samantha see what she really needs to do?

18. Ford is devastated when Samantha returns to work. With her, he'd gotten a taste of love and happiness again, only to experience another loss. The children are grieving, too. When he takes them camping at Elkmont as a good diversion for them all, who shows up unexpectedly? How do Ford and the children react? When Samantha shares her news about a possible job she might take nearby – and that she's hoping for an incentive to say yes – who first picks up on what she's hinting at? Then what does Ford do and what happens afterward?

