

# BOOK CLUB KIT

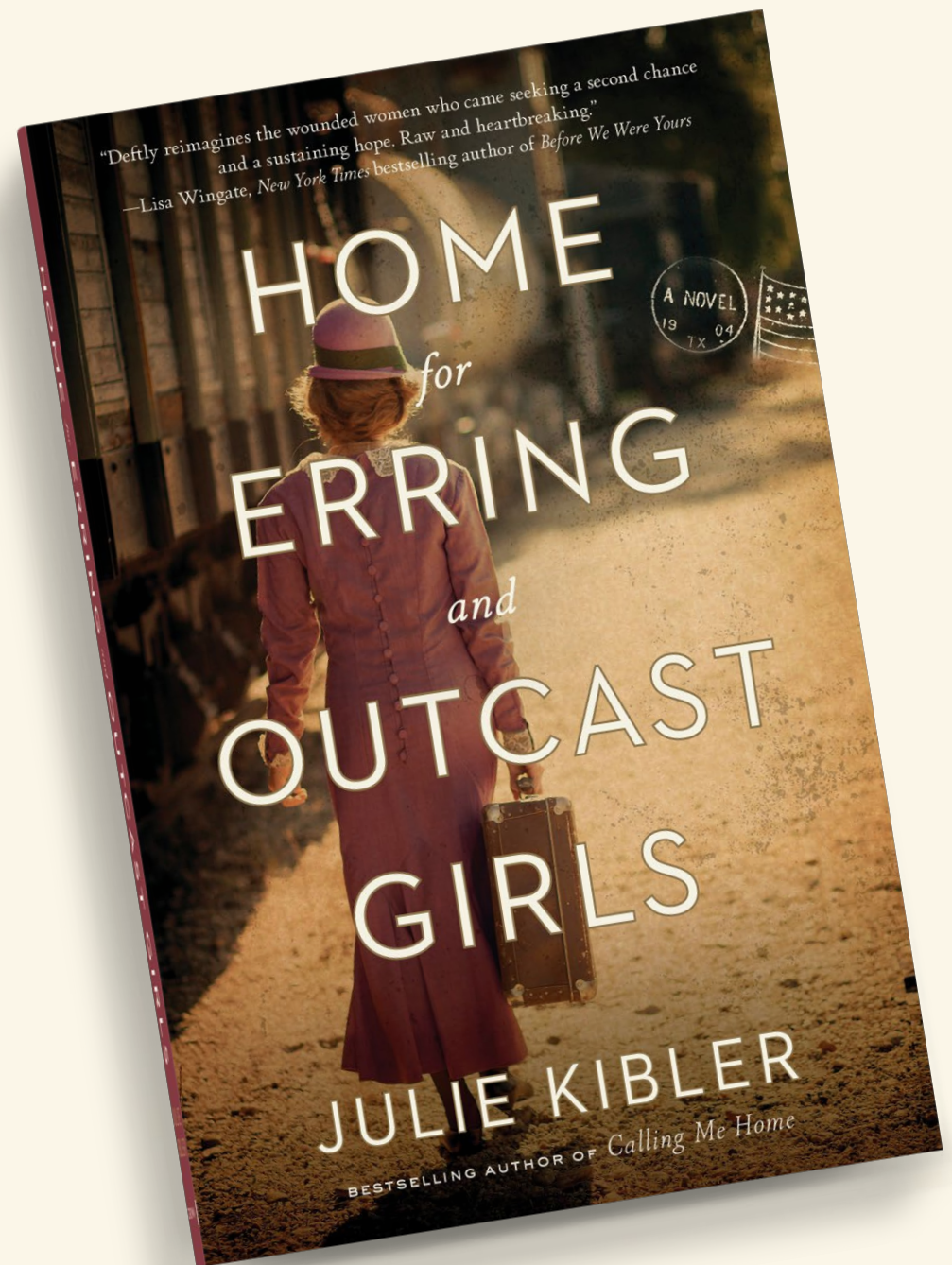
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DISCUSSION GUIDE

A CONVERSATION  
WITH JULIE KIBLER

FOOD & DRINK IDEAS

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For more historical photos of the Berachah Home, its founders, and a number of its residents, click here or visit [juliekibler.com/gallery](http://juliekibler.com/gallery)

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1. Portrait of Rev. J.T. Upchurch and his wife, Maggie Mae Upchurch, founders of the Berachah Rescue Work; 1912 2. Berachah Home dedication service; May 14, 1903

3. Berachah Home; Whitehill Tabernacle; ca. 1917-1925 4. Berachah Home; parlor group shot; ca. 1905

All photos courtesy of Special Collections, UT-Arlington Libraries



# DISCUSSION GUIDE



1. Novels told from multiple points of view give the reader insight into many character perspectives, which may help us understand why characters make certain decisions. Did any character in *Home for Erring and Outcast Girls* make a decision you felt was unfathomable or unforgiveable?
2. Which character did you most relate to in the novel? Which character did you find the most difficult to empathize with?
3. We enter the story through Lizzie's third-person point of view, whereas Cate's storyline is told in the first person. What benefits do each of these narrative structures have? Do you feel you were able to gain insight into each character's thoughts or feelings? Did you trust both narrative forms?
4. Cate's sense of identity is turned upside down at a pivotal point in her adolescence. What impact do you think this had on her life? How could her family or community have played a more supportive role? Have you observed or experienced any similar situations?
5. Lizzie vows to keep her daughter safe at any cost. How do you think this affected Lizzie's relationships—especially with Docie as she matured? How does their relationship contrast with other mother-daughter type relationships in the novel, biological and not?
6. Mattie and Lizzie's friendship is central to the storyline, and arguably what helped both women overcome extremely difficult circumstances. What other themes of sisterhood and friendship appear throughout the novel? What examples of destructive female relationships appear?
7. Cate seemingly suppressed a good deal of emotional hardship by suffering through the trauma of her youth alone. Why do you think she didn't confide in Jess, whom she considered her best friend? Or in River? How do you think her character might have fared if she'd had a friend like Mattie? How does Cate's relationship with Laurel in the present day inspire her to change?
8. Did you find Hallie to be a sympathetic character? Was there any point at which you began to understand her point of view, or any point at which you lost empathy for her?
9. At one point, Lizzie notes that "everyone might be worth saving, but not everyone can be saved." What does that mean to you? Do you think it's true? How do themes of piety and faith play out in ways that helped the women in the past? Or that harmed them? What about for Cate?
10. Were you surprised by the twist in Cate's past? How did it affect your reading of the first part of the story? What do you think is the future of Cate's relationships with Laurel and River?
11. What did you glean from the relationship between Cate and Laurel? Did you think Cate's desire and invitation to adopt Laurel was appropriate, even if Laurel was technically an adult? Have you ever been a foster parent or child, formally or informally? How did it change you? Have you ever considered taking on this role? What fears do you have about fostering?
12. Ultimately, the stories of the women of the Berachah Home are fictionalized accounts of what factually occurred to countless women during that period. What is the benefit of reading a fictionalized story about this time period? How is it different from reading nonfiction about the same events?
13. Which themes in *Home for Erring and Outcast Girls* are still applicable today? What has changed? What hasn't? Did reading this novel transform any ideas or opinions you have held? Did it inspire personal change or encourage you to advocate for "outcast" women or girls in your world?



# A CONVERSATION WITH JULIE KIBLER



**Q. How did you first learn about the Berachah Industrial Home for the Redemption of Erring Girls?**

A. I was writing another book when a friend posted a link on Facebook to an article about the “most haunted places in Arlington, Texas.” I was intrigued after having lived in Arlington for several decades. I skeptically, and fortunately, read all the way to the bottom of the list. The last item was the cemetery for the Berachah Industrial Home, located on the University of Texas at Arlington campus. I had never heard of the home or the cemetery, but once I read further, I was hooked.

**Q. Can you tell us about how you conducted your research, both about the home, as well as what life was like for women in Texas and Oklahoma City at the turn of the century?**

A. First, I did a “quick and dirty” Internet search about the home. With a basic grasp on the subject, I visited the University of Texas at Arlington’s Special Collections, followed by a trip to the cemetery itself. I was amazed at the depth of the physically small collection—especially by what I saw and read in the home’s monthly publications—and haunted, emotionally, by what I found in the cemetery: the enigmatic inscription on one particular stone. I needed to find out what it meant. I made multiple visits to dig deeper into the collection, and also studied newspaper archives, maps, census records, and many more sources as I chased down the histories of Mattie and Lizzie. I had the privilege of speaking to a few Arlington residents who were alive while the home was in operation, and a member of the Upchurch family.

**Q. About three thousand girls passed through the Berachah Home. How did you pick Lizzie and Mattie as the focus of your book?**

A. While the Berachah Home’s monthly publications profiled multiple women, these two stood out. Lizzie’s history was told in stark detail, while Mattie’s was simply alluded to. It was unclear, however, where either eventually ended up, and I love a good mystery, both personally and for my novels. I came to adore Lizzie and Mattie, Lizzie’s daughter Docie, and many others—as much as is possible with people you’ve never met.

**Q. Through your work with the University of Texas, Arlington, you have met women who still remember when the home existed. What have they told you about the role the home played in the community?**

A. Several individuals who remember the home told me interesting, sometimes amusing, stories. One woman said she was not even allowed to look at the buildings as she walked by as a child, because it was “that place for those women.” Another spoke fondly of interacting with some of the young women at local church events. One was afraid I would mention names, which was intriguing, but I assured her I was only naming women who had very public histories or had passed away without any living progeny, so as not to embarrass any descendants of the women who lived in the home. I wanted to be very respectful of those who went on to have families and fulfilling lives—all while bearing in mind that J. T. Upchurch, the minister who founded the home, was always adamant about not hiding the past. He believed in grace and redemption for those who were not afraid to start over, warts and all.





## A CONVERSATION WITH JULIE KIBLER (CONTINUED)



**Q. Do you think that aspects of the women's struggles in the early 1900s will particularly resonate with readers today, and if so, which parts in particular?**

A. Anyone who has paid attention to the news media over the last few years would agree that women, especially, are still marginalized and often victimized without any public acknowledgment of such. The #metoo movement is a good start to making change in the area of sexual harassment and assault, but I suspect we have a long way to go. Change is hard, and usually slow.

**Q. Did you find out anything interesting in your research that did not make it into the book?**

A. It is always difficult to know when to stop the research and start the writing. It's hard to know what to put in, and what to leave out. My editor reminded me I was writing a novel, not biographies, and to use only what served the story. I still, however, wake up suddenly at night in a panic because I forgot to include something that seemed critical to the story. So many stories of other women touched me so deeply, I wanted to tell them all. In particular, I learned a lot about Oklahoma City's fascinating history—such as the underground tunnels and living quarters for many of its Chinese residents during the time Mattie lived there. That needs to go in a book, but didn't make it into this one!

**Q. Why did you decide to explore the women's stories through the lens of Cate, a modern-day librarian?**

A. I enjoy stories that speak to where we've been, where we are, and where we're going as a society. I share similarities with Cate as far as history and personality, but also many differences. She is a composite of me and many other girls and women I've known. In ways, my process of writing this story is reflected in Cate's research process in the novel. I have a master's degree in library science, and while I never worked in a library beyond my internship, I have such admiration for librarians—our "keepers of history," and their huge responsibility in choosing what to save and what to discard, and bringing new information to light.

**Q. You switch between different women's points of view and weave together different time periods. Did you face any challenges in doing so? Was there a favorite character you enjoyed writing about?**

A. It is difficult to weave together characters and eras, and this novel required careful calculations, deleting many extra words, and several intense revisions with my editor. Readers will surely discover errors, but I attempted to make it as seamless as possible. Each character is my favorite, just like each of my children. I had particular sympathy for Miss Hallie/Hallye. She was expected to be an upstanding example, but she'd had a difficult life herself. She was simply lucky enough to begin her career without the burden of the calamities or mishaps the residents had experienced.



## A CONVERSATION WITH JULIE KIBLER (CONTINUED)



**Q.** *Home for Erring and Outcast Girls*, as well as parts of your first novel, *Calling Me Home*, takes place in Texas. How have your own experiences in Texas influenced your writing?

**A.** Texas is a unique place—not quite southern, not quite western, and certainly not northern or eastern. I arrived in Texas at age seventeen to attend college, and I felt I had come home, as my mother’s family was predominately Texan. At the same time, I’ve remained a fish out of water because I’m not a native. There is a definite sense of pride and certain qualities that go hand in hand with being born Texan. While the population is often stereotyped, it is really as diverse as the rest of the United States. Regardless, the majority of native Texans you encounter have undying loyalties to family, friends, and ideas, and are a force to be reckoned with. I enjoy writing characters with these qualities in physical settings as diverse as the people—from piney woods to plains, from mountainous deserts to salt water. Conflict, emotion, and passion have no choice but to ignite on the page.

**Q.** What do you hope that readers take away from *Home for Erring and Outcast Girls*?

**A.** I hope readers will, first of all, find the story enjoyable, poignant, and ultimately uplifting, even in the face of the nearly incomprehensible tragedy so many of the characters experience. Second, I hope it will cause readers to carefully consider their own preconceived—perhaps learned—notions and expectations, and find the grace and strength to be open to those who have different life experiences.





# FOOD & DRINK IDEAS FOR YOUR BOOK CLUB

Traditional Texas dishes—and liquid refreshments!—with new names

## Mattie's Miracle

(Makes 1 serving)

Everyone knows the traditional alcoholic drink of Texas is a margarita, but if Mattie ever drank again after the disastrous Oklahoma City beer episode, she'd likely have given her drink a twist when she was homesick for Texas by adding peach nectar and turning it into the margarita's bitter sister—also known as a Peach Paloma.

1½ shots silver tequila (1 ½ ounces or 45 ml)	2 ounces peach nectar
Juice from a fresh lime or the equivalent bottled (1 ounce or 30 ml)	½ shot agave or other sugar syrup (¾ ounce or 20 ml)
Juice from half of a grapefruit or the equivalent bottled (2½ ounces or 75 ml)	2½ ounces or 75 ml grapefruit soda or club soda

1. Juice the lime and grapefruit.
2. Mix the tequila, lime juice, grapefruit juice, peach nectar, and syrup.
3. Pour over ice and top with the soda.

### Optional

*Rim the glass with salt or sugar.*

*Leave the syrup out for those watching sugar.*

## Miss Hallye's Hallelujah Chili

(Serves 6)

Say that three times fast. The more chili powder used, the louder the hallelujah.

2–3 tablespoons butter, oil, or bacon fat	Up to 1 teaspoon salt, to taste
½ cup chopped onions (or to taste)	1 teaspoon sugar (optional)
½ garlic clove, minced (or to taste)	2 teaspoons ground cumin
1 pound ground beef	2 teaspoons to 2 tablespoons chili powder, depending on taste and strength of powder
1 to 2 15-ounce cans diced tomatoes (undrained)	Garnishes (sour cream, shredded cheese, green onions, etc.)
2 15-ounce cans kidney beans (drained, rinse if desired)	Tortillas, tortilla chips, crackers, or cornbread

1. Heat the butter, oil, or fat over medium heat in a large skillet.
2. Sauté the onions and garlic until the onions are translucent, then set aside.
3. Brown the ground beef in the same pan and drain the fat, if desired.
4. Add the cooked onions and garlic, tomatoes, beans, salt, sugar, cumin, and chili powder to the beef.
5. Mix well, cover, and cook on low for about an hour, or at higher heat for at least 15 to 20 minutes. Stir occasionally.
6. Serve with shredded cheddar cheese, sour cream, tortillas, tortilla chips, crackers, or cornbread.



# FOOD & DRINK IDEAS FOR YOUR BOOK CLUB

Traditional Texas dishes—and liquid refreshments!—with new names

## Dilly's Call-the-Doctor Delight

(Serves 12 to 18)

This take on traditional Texas sheet cake adds the national beverage of Texas, which starts with Dr and ends with a spice found in a shaker on the table. If this cake doesn't pep you right up (immediately followed by a carb crash), it might send you into labor, depending on your own unique condition.

### For the cake

2 cups sugar	4 heaping teaspoons
2 cups all-purpose flour	cocoa powder
2 sticks butter (½ cup)	2 eggs
1 cup of your favorite	½ cup buttermilk
peppery, fruit-flavored	1 teaspoon baking soda
carbonated beverage (can	1 teaspoon vanilla
sub. with cola or water, but	
that's cheating)	

### For the icing

1 stick butter (½ cup)	5 tablespoons cocoa powder
½ cup carbonated beverage	1 teaspoon vanilla
(can substitute with milk,	1 cup chopped walnuts or
but . . . cheating)	pecans (optional)
1 teaspoon ground	
cinnamon	

### For the cake

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F.
2. In a large mixing bowl, sift together the sugar and flour.
3. In a medium saucepan, combine the butter, carbonated beverage, and cocoa. Heat until the butter is melted and the mixture is hot but not boiling. Pour the mixture over the sugar and flour, and mix well.
4. Add the eggs one at a time and mix well.
5. In a small bowl, mix together the buttermilk, baking soda, and vanilla, then add the mixture to the large bowl and mix until smooth.
6. Pour the batter into a 10 x 15-inch jelly roll pan or a 9 x 13-inch cake pan. Bake 18 to 20 minutes for the jelly roll pan or 25 to 27 minutes for the cake pan. The cake is done when the top isn't sticky or wobbly and an inserted toothpick comes out cleanly.

### For the icing (while the cake bakes)

1. Sift the powdered sugar into a large mixing bowl.
2. In small saucepan, heat the butter, carbonated beverage, and cinnamon until the butter is melted and mixture is hot but not boiling.
3. Add the vanilla and cocoa powder and mix well.
4. Pour the mixture over the powdered sugar and mix well.
5. Optional: Add one cup of chopped nuts. (I prefer it plain!)
6. Pour/spread the icing over the hot cake.

Serve the cake with vanilla ice cream and get ready to call the doctor if anyone shows signs of anything unexpected. Can be served warm or, even better, cold from the fridge.



# FOOD & DRINK IDEAS FOR YOUR BOOK CLUB

Traditional Texas dishes—and liquid refreshments!—with new names

## Lizzie's Sticka-Cuppa-Cuppa-Cuppa-Canna Cobbler

(Serves 6–8)

Lizzie struggled to read and write, but she could have easily remembered this simple recipe for cobbler with any fruit—but generally, peaches.

1 stick ( $\frac{1}{2}$ cup) butter	1 cup milk
1 cup self-rising flour (or add 1 teaspoon baking powder to 1 cup all- purpose flour)	1 15-ounce can fruit (or 2 cups pie filling or very ripe sliced fruits)
1 cup sugar	

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F.
2. Melt the butter in a 9 x 13-inch cake pan or a 2-quart baking dish.
3. In a medium bowl, mix together the flour, sugar, and milk and pour the mixture into the pan or baking dish over the melted butter.
4. Distribute the fruit, including any syrup, evenly over the batter. Do not stir or mix.
5. Bake 30 to 45 minutes, until the crust is golden brown.
6. Let the cobbler cool for 10 to 15 minutes before serving.

The cobbler is best served with vanilla ice cream. In Texas we'd most certainly serve the brand named after a flower that isn't our state flower, the bluebonnet, but sounds a lot like it, as long as it hasn't been recalled ately—which, naturally, sends the republic into an existential crisis.