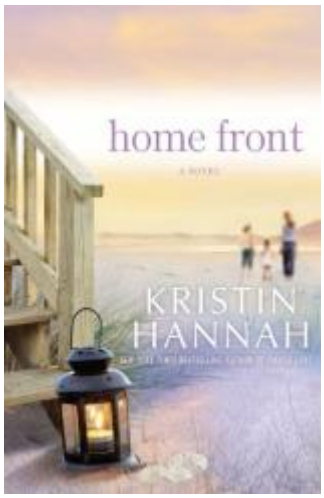
Home Front

by Kristin Hannah



About the Book

In her bestselling novels Kristin Hannah has plumbed the depths of friendship, the loyalty of sisters, and the secrets mothers keep. Now, in her most emotionally powerful story yet, she explores the intimate landscape of a troubled marriage with this provocative and timely portrait of a husband and wife, in love and at war.

All marriages have a breaking point. All families have wounds. All wars have a cost....

Like many couples, Michael and Jolene Zarkades have to face the pressures of everyday life --- children, careers, bills, chores --- even as their 12-year marriage is falling apart. Then an unexpected deployment sends Jolene deep into harm's way and leaves defense attorney Michael at home, unaccustomed to being a single parent to their two girls. As a mother, it agonizes Jolene to leave her family, but as a solider she has always understood the true meaning of duty. In her letters home, she paints a rose-colored version of her life on the front lines, shielding her family from the truth. But war will change Jolene in ways that none of them could have foreseen. When tragedy strikes, Michael must face his darkest fear and fight a battle of his own --- for everything that matters to his family.

At once a profoundly honest look at modern marriage and a dramatic exploration of the toll war takes on an ordinary American family, HOME FRONT is a story of love, loss, heroism, honor and, ultimately, hope.

Discussion Guide

1. In the prologue of **Home Front**, we see Jolene's early life and the incident that leads up to her parents' deaths. How does this scene lay the groundwork for her personality and her choices in the remainder of the book?

2. When Michael says, "I don't love you anymore," he wonders fleetingly if he'd said the words so that Jolene would fall apart or cry or say that she was in love with him. What does this internal question reveal about Michael? About Jolene?

3. When Jolene learns of her deployment, she is conflicted. She thinks that she wants to go (to war), but that she doesn't want to leave (her family). Can you understand the dichotomy she is experiencing? Discuss a mother's deployment and what it means from all angles --- honor, love, commitment, abandonment. Can you understand a soldier/mother's duty? Do you think it's harder for a mother to leave than a father? Is there a double standard?

4. Jolene and Michael's 12-year marriage is on the rocks when the novel begins. Did you blame both of them equally for the problems in their relationship? Did your assignment of blame change over the course of the

novel?

5. Jolene worries that Betsy will see her deployment as abandonment. Do you agree with this? Think of yourself at Betsy and Seth's age: how would your twelve-year-old-self have reacted to your mother going off to war?

6. When Michael sees Jolene for the first time in Germany, he is so overwhelmed by the magnitude of her injuries that he can't be strong for her. He reveals both pity and revulsion. Discuss his reaction. How do you think you would handle a similar situation?

7. At home, Jolene can't cope with her new life. She can't reconcile the woman she used to be with the woman she has become. She wonders how it could be harder to return from war than to fight in it. What does she mean by this? A soldier gets a lot of training and preparation before going to war. Should there be more preparation for returning home?

8. Early in Jolene's homecoming, Mila says: "We all knew how hard it would be to have you gone, but no one told us how hard it would be when you came back." What do you think about this comment? Do we romanticize homecomings and thereby somehow set ourselves up for disappointment? What could her family have done to make Jolene's return an easier transition?

9. At the beginning of her physical therapy, Jolene asks Conny how she is supposed to forget about her injury if it keeps hurting. What does this question reveal about Jolene's personality and her attitude toward her injury? How does this attitude hinder her recovery? How does it help her?

10. Dr. Cornflower describes Jolene as a woman who has spent a lifetime in the Army getting what she wants from a system that doesn't want to give it to her. What does he mean by this? Do you agree? How is a woman's career in the military different from any other career? How is it similar?

11. During the Keller trial, Michael turns in the middle of his opening address to look at Jolene. Why did he choose this very public forum as the time to address the Iraq War with his wife?

12. Although the dire effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are as timeless as war itself, the counseling and support services provided to military men and women returning from war are often insufficient, and the public is often ill-informed about the vast consequences of the disorder. What did you already know about the disorder, and what insights did you gain from reading **Home Front**?

13. Discuss the various relationships formed between parent and child, from Michael's relationship with his daughters and his grief for his father to Jolene's relationship with Mila. Which struck the most resounding chord for you? Why?

14. On page 177, Jolene thinks about the word "heroes" and all that it means in the shadow of loss. For her, heroes were her fallen comrades. What is the definition of a hero to you? Who is one of your own heroes? How do our heroes reflect our values?

15. This book explores a lot of dramatic situations and powerful emotions. Has reading it changed you in any way? What was the most important thing you learned in reading this book? Who would you like to recommend the book to and why?

Author Bio

Kristin Hannah is the *New York Times* bestselling author of 21 novels. A former lawyer turned writer, she is the mother of one son and lives with her husband in the Pacific Northwest and Hawaii.

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