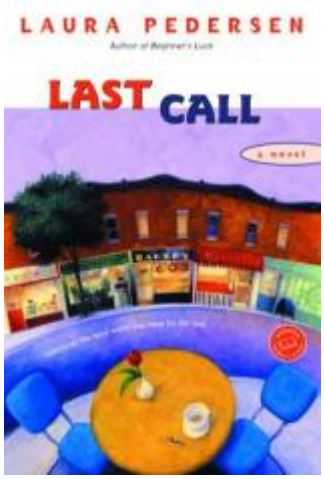
bookreporter

Last Call

by Laura Pedersen



About the Book

Having descended from a long line of indomitable, good-humored Scots, Hayden MacBride sees no reason to take his own death lying down. In fact, he now spends his days crashing funerals for the free food and insight into the Great Beyond. Then he meets Rosamond, a nun playing hooky from the Holy Orders. Hayden is smitten the instant her heavy silver cross smacks him in the face when she leaps up to do the wave at a ball game. Luckily, Rosamond has picked the right person to teach her how to live . . . and to love—because nobody does both better than Hayden MacBride.

However, Rosamond's years in the convent have not prepared her for the oddball characters of Hayden's world. There's his ever-fretful, vigilant daughter, Diana, the "Dutchess o' the Sidelong Glance"; his sweet grandson Joey, struggling to break free of his mother's overprotective embrace; Hayden's bagpipe-blowing cronies; the Greyfriars Gang; neighbor Bobbie Anne, a "working girl" full of good advice and tender mercies; and Hank, the sexy architect contemplating the priesthood—a *big* mistake in Hayden's book. For Hayden thinks that Hank should be married to his daughter and raising Joey. And he has an elaborate plan to make Hank see things his way. . . .

In an uproariously funny novel of love, laughter, and one man's final call at the riotous watering hole called life, Laura Pedersen proves that miracles are all around us—when we open our eyes and our hearts to embrace them.

Discussion Guide

1. Have circumstances driven Diana to become more overprotective and fretful than she might be if life were easier at the moment—if she had more money and a nice husband, and if her father wasn't ill? Have you ever gone through a rough period when you felt like a person on the verge of a breakdown due to events beyond your control—when life temporarily eclipses your true personality, or at least the person you want to be?

2. Is Hayden a good or bad influence on his grandson? Is Hayden helpful in counteracting Diana's coddling of her son, especially now that he's almost a teenager? Or is Hayden the one making Diana anxious in the first place?

3. Does Hayden's appreciation of the freedom and opportunity he's found in the United States, combined with fierce pride for his homeland, bring to mind the mixed attitudes shared by immigrants you know?

4. Does it matter what religion, if any, Joey becomes when he's older? Or have Hayden and Rosamond imparted other valuable lessons?

5. Do you know people who have fallen out over religion, or decided not to marry because of the issue? Would you agree or disagree that there are certain situations where the differences and difficulties just can't be overcome?

6. Has Rosamond truly lost her faith, or, as a woman coming to the end of her childbearing years, is she suffering from a vacuum of human affec- tion? Is it possible to live a rich and full life and not know physical intimacy?

7. Why does Diana suddenly allow Joey to play baseball after her sister's stepson dies in a freak accident? Shouldn't this event serve to make her more fearful that Joey will be injured?

8. Is Hayden really an atheist or does he have his own spiritual program to live a good and full life—perhaps "Haydenism"? Would you say that you subscribe to all the tenets of a specific faith or that you've assembled your own guidelines?

9. Is it possible that any events in the book were meant to be miracles? Or are they just life's typical accidents and coincidences?

10. If you wanted to find biblical equivalents for the characters in *Last Call*, who might have the most in common with Bobbie Anne?

11. Being a good parent often involves making difficult choices and personal sacrifices. What are some real-life examples of this made by people you know?

12. Rosamond lost her mother when she was young. Hayden lost his father and had a difficult youth because his family lost their farm. Joey's parents are divorced and he no longer sees his father. Do you think such childhood events forever change the way we see and react to the world? When you look back, is there anything you experienced early on, good or bad, that you'd say has had a tremendous impact on later decisions, or the way you've chosen to live your life or raise your family?

13. Diana and her sister, Linda, appear to have had a pleasant childhood, complete with two parents who love and provide for them. Yet the sisters don't get along. Why do family tensions often arise even when there's no apparent reason for it? Are there siblings in your family who aren't close and it's hard to determine when or why it all started?

14. By the end of the story has Rosamond converted Hayden or vice versa? Or are they both able to love in their own way and stay true to opposing belief systems?

15. Is it possible to overcome some religious differences by focusing on the similarities?

16. Why does Rosamond return to the convent at the end of the story?

17. What do you think Rosamond and Hayden would say about I Corinthians 13:13: "There are three things that will endure: faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love"? Is it true that love can transcend everything, including religion and even death?

Author Bio

Laura Pedersen is an author, humorist and playwright. She was also the youngest person at age 20 to have a seat on the American Stock Exchange, while earning a finance degree at New York University's Stern School of Business. She wrote about that experience in her first book, PLAY MONEY, which received rave reviews and became a bestseller. At age 25, she was the youngest columnist for *The New York Times*.

Glamour magazine named Pedersen one of ten "Outstanding Young Working Women" in 1990. In 1994 President Clinton honored her as one of Ten Outstanding Young Americans. Pedersen has appeared on national television outlets such as CNN, "Oprah," "Good Morning America," "CBS This Morning," "Today," "Primetime Live," and "Late Night with David Letterman." She has also performed stand-up comedy at The Improv, among other clubs, and writes material for several well-known comedians. She has an honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters from Canisius College.

Pedersen's books have won many awards and honors, including the Three Oaks Prize for Fiction, a B&N "Discover New Voices" selection, and a Borders "Original Voices" selection. Her fiction includes GOING AWAY PARTY, the Hallie Palmer series (BEGINNER'S LUCK, HEART'S DESIRE, THE BIG SHUFFLE and BEST BET), the romantic comedies LAST CALL and FOOL'S MATE, and a collection of short stories called THE SWEETEST HOURS.

BUFFALO GAL, a humorous memoir about growing up in the economically devastated Rust Belt during the

1970s, was named best autobiography by *ForeWord* magazine, received an honorable mention from The Eric Hoffer Book Award, and an honorable mention at the New York Book Festival. BUFFALO UNBOUND, humorous essays about the current revitalization of Pedersen's hometown and the Western New York area, won the Indie Book Award in the Humor/Comedy category and was an International Book Award finalist in the categories of Travel Essay and Humor. Other nonfiction books include TRAINS, PLANES, AND AUTO-RICKSHAWS and LIFE IN NEW YORK: How I Learned to Love Squeegee Men, Token Suckers, Trash Twisters, and Subway Sharks.

Pedersen's first children's book, UNPLUGGED: Ella Gets Her Family Back, was a Mom's Choice Awards Gold recipient and won several other awards for its message about families and technology. UNPLUGGED received a *Skipping Stones* magazine Honor Award for respecting multicultural and ecological awareness in children's literature, was selected by the United Methodist Women's Reading Program Committee for their children's book list, and won a bronze for best picture book for children of all ages in the Moonbeam Children's Book Awards.

Pedersen's latest children's book, AVA'S ADVENTURE, is about the power of the imagination to entertain, and also features a multicultural family. Her children's stories are developed around young people creating solutions for their problems without adult intervention.

Pedersen's award-winning plays have been performed in festivals and Off-Broadway. Her full- length musical *This Will All Be Yours* (lyrics and music by Charles Bloom) premiered at the Midtown International Theatre Festival this July, and her award-winning full-length play, *The Brightness of Heaven*, opens at New York's Off-Broadway Cherry Lane Theatre in October of 2014.

Pedersen is also an ordained minister who occasionally gives sermons at Unitarian Universalist churches and fellowships around the country and in Canada. She belongs to the Authors Guild, the international literary association P.E.N. and is an honorary member of the Twentieth Century Club.

Critical Praise

"A fresh and funny look at not fitting in."

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