



# *Falling into the Sun*

## A READER'S GUIDE

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ANCIENT CHILD

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

RESOURCES

Readers can print out this guide at

[www.CharrieHazard.com](http://www.CharrieHazard.com)

## *About the Author*

Charrie Hazard grew up on the Potomac River in Hallowing Point, Virginia, a small, isolated community at the river's end of Mason's Neck Federal Wildlife Preserve. She was one of seven children in a rather chaotic household run by highly intellectual, talented and loving parents, both of whom were children of alcoholics.

Her father, John W. Hazard Sr., a journalist, author and editor, was executive editor of *Changing Times Magazine* (now *Kiplinger*) during Charrie's youth. He spent his evenings writing books, humorous columns and short stories, such as "The Flying Teakettle," which after first appearing in *The New Yorker* was made into the movie *You're in the Navy Now*, starring Gary Cooper. Although her father was somewhat aloof during Charrie's childhood, and a strict disciplinarian, he nevertheless instilled in his children a strong sense of ethics, integrity and generosity.

Charrie's mother, Helen K. Hazard, was a poet and author of children's stories as well as the director of Gunston Hall School, a private elementary school which specialized in children with learning disabilities. She taught ancient history and had her young students read classics, such as Homer's

*Iliad*. As reflected in her collected poems, *Footnotes Along the Way* (available at Amazon.com), Helen struggled with depression but tenaciously held to the belief in the goodness of life and its primacy over death.

As a teenager, Charrie spent much of her free time either sailing the Potomac with her parents in her father's nineteen-foot sloop or riding the family's chestnut hunter through the wildlife refuge, often bareback and accompanied by only the family dog. Otherwise, she had her nose in a book. The bookshelves of her home were filled with classics. With her mother's encouragement, Charrie became a voracious reader of literature and poetry. She quickly graduated from *The World of Pooh* to *A Little Princess* and *Little Women* to *Pride and Prejudice* and *Huckleberry Finn* to *The Brothers Karmozov* and *Les Misérables*.

Though her parents were members of and attended the historic Pohick Episcopal Church, her mother's spiritual views were quite liberal and often defied the boundaries of organized religion, including the idea that only one religion held the key to God. Instead, Helen believed God revealed Himself through not only the world's major religions but also great art and literature. Consequently, she introduced Charrie to such spiritual works as *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran; *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor E. Frankl; and *Wind, Sand and Stars* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

By the time she was a high school senior, Charrie knew she wanted to be a novelist. After graduating from The College of William and Mary with a B.A. in history, she discussed this dream with her father. He encouraged her to go into journalism to develop the habit of daily writing and to learn to write on deadline. Charrie took a job as a feature writer at the *Lynchburg News & Daily Advance*, was soon promoted to the news side and, over the next two years, won numerous awards, including two first-place awards for investigative reporting from the Virginia Press Association.

One of these honored her twelve-part investigative series on the Lynchburg Training School and Hospital, at the time the nation's largest institution for the mentally handicapped. The series exposed patient neglect and abuse, low employee morale and poor working conditions, and touched off state and local investigations that led to corrective measures.

She then took a job with the *St. Petersburg Times*, where she started as a police and court reporter, graduated to special projects and ultimately became a member of the editorial board, writing editorials, by-line columns and Sunday *Perspective* pieces. Her favorite columns and editorials were those that called for justice for the disenfranchised whose voices would otherwise go unheard.

She continued to use her investigative reporting skills, leading her, at times, to break news in her editorials. She exposed, for example, negligence on the part of the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services (HRS) that contributed to the death from abuse of seven-month-old Eddie Elmore. Charrie wrote the editorial despite an HRS official's threat to press criminal charges against her, personally, should the *Times* publish information from the HRS abuse report, which state law protected from public scrutiny. (The local sheriff's office mistakenly included the report in the criminal investigation of Eddie's death, a copy of which Charrie received through a public records request.) The *Times* editors published the editorial.

While working at the *Times*, Charrie began to date Michael Moscardini, who at the time was the paper's national editor. They were of very different temperaments—Charrie was outgoing and optimistic; Michael was an introvert and a self-proclaimed pessimist—and of those who knew them both, few thought they were a good match. They married a year after they met.

After ten years as a successful journalist, Charrie nevertheless felt unfulfilled. She also had come to believe she was

not a good enough writer to become a novelist. After the birth of her second child, she left the *Times* and pursued her M.A. in English at the University of South Florida. While working on her degree, she had her third child. But her attention became increasingly focused on her oldest child and only son, whose volatile temper was leading to increasingly violent confrontations.

After earning her M.A. she taught English and writing at St. Petersburg College and writing at the University of South Florida (USF). She might have made that a full-time career, but for a life-changing moment: She walked in on her neighbor's suicide. He had hanged himself in his garage. The sight caused her to envision her son in the same position. Charrie realized then that the kind of despair that drove her neighbor to suicide fueled her son's outbursts. She sought psychological help for her son, who ultimately was diagnosed with anxiety disorder.

The suicide also forced Charrie to come to grips with the legacy of alcoholism in her family and her own issues with anxiety. It also drove her to re-evaluate her life and her beliefs, a process encouraged and guided by her son's psychologist, Dr. Michael T. Smith, and her godmother and spiritual mentor, Jane Carrigan, a close friend of Charrie's mother. During this period she read and was profoundly influenced by Julia Cameron's *The Artist's Way* as well as India's sacred scripture, the *Bhagavad Gita*. She resurrected her dream and wrote several award-winning creative nonfiction essays before starting a novel titled *In Our Midst*, which chronicles the parallel journeys of two women thwarted in the pursuit of their dreams. But often, when she sat down to work, her neighbor's suicide bubbled up. Finally, she put aside the unfinished *In Our Midst* and began to write about her neighbor. The result was *Falling into the Sun*. Though loosely based on her experiences, it is a novel.

Charrie currently teaches writing at the University of

Tampa and is working on her second novel. She is a member of the National League of American Pen Women, Inc., and is a former program director of Lifelong Writers, the now defunct membership arm of The Florida Center for Writers at USF. She also is a board member of the Gunston Hall School Foundation, Washington, D.C., which provides scholarships to elementary and secondary school students with learning disabilities who cannot afford the specialized education they need. She has won six major journalism awards. Her creative nonfiction has been published in a number of literary journals and has won prizes from organizations such as The National League of American Pen Women, Tampa Writers Alliance and Mount Dora Festival of Music and Literature.

She lives with her husband of twenty-four years and their three children in Safety Harbor, Florida. The marriage, as it turned out, was a keeper.

For more information, visit Charrie's Web site:  
[www.CharrieHazard.com](http://www.CharrieHazard.com).

## *Ancient Child*

Delights in the puzzle,  
fitting a jig of mundane  
to a saw of eternity.

With unvarying marvel  
hunts through all traditions,  
from stars, to awakened one,  
to carpenter unwooden,  
for jagged bits of truth,  
wide-eyed at proof  
when piece locks into piece.

Lips tremble as, mystery-laden,  
the piecemeal picture rises:  
beauty, smudged but unsullied.

Eyes weep with wonder,  
seeing One in all.  
Giggles gush  
over murky flaws,  
sanctifying me with  
a wellspring of love  
unclouded by censure.

I am converted  
to her soul's sparkling  
vision of me.

Of God. One.

—*for Jane*

Charrie Hazard, February 2003

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1) Where does the title *Falling into the Sun* appear in the novel? How does it operate as a metaphor?

2) As Michael flies toward the center of creation, or God, after his death, he realizes that, “like a poorly drawn arrow, he is awry. The realization ravages him. The arrow of his life missing this mark—the only mark.” But even as his despair threatens to destroy him, he sees the center move, aligning itself with “his distorted aim” (pp. 17-18).

The word sin originates from the Greek archery term meaning “to miss the mark.” Michael later realizes that the center “moves for everyone” and that “missing the mark is not the final reality” (p. 110). What does this mean? Do you agree with Michael’s perception? How does this idea square with more traditional Christian concepts of judgment of and punishment for sins?

3) Chapter Two begins with Kate asking her students about the nature of evil. What different views of evil does the novel present? Does Kate’s view of evil change over the course of the novel? If so, how and why?

4) In what ways is Nick a traditional Episcopal priest? In what ways is he not? What other spiritual traditions does he draw on in his approach to life and God?

5) When Kate was young, several teenagers drown in the river on which her family lived. Kate’s mother, sensing her daughter’s distress, told her that though the river is beautiful “we mustn’t forget how powerful she is, how treacherous she can be.... That doesn’t mean we should fear her.... Respect her. Hold her in awe. But don’t be afraid of her. Fear



is a poor counselor. It compromises us; it compromises our judgment” (p. 121).

Jean tells Kate that fear can be life destroying (p. 86).

Analyze the many fears that plague Kate during the novel. How do they affect the different aspects of her life, from addressing her son’s illness to pursuing her dreams? Does she ultimately overcome them and, if so, how?

Do you agree that fear is one of the biggest blocks to living a fully realized life? Why?

6) Early in the novel, Kate realizes she hears God in Jean’s laughter (p. 23). Later, Michael notes that “Laughter is a strand in the song. It vibrates through [Kate] and her god-mother almost continuously when they’re together” (p. 211). Why is Jean’s laughter so healing?

How does Jean view God? Are Jean’s beliefs borne out through Michael’s experience in “the center”?

Kate says to Nick, “If anyone has been the face of God for me in my life, it’s Jean.” (p. 291-291). What qualities in Jean do you think account for this?

7) What are the likely physical and psychological legacies of Kyle’s alcoholism on his children and grandchildren? Do you believe Kyle will ever seek professional help, as Kate advises him to do at the end of the novel?

8) Do you believe Kyle loved Kate’s mother? From what little the novel reveals, how do you envision their relationship? Who does Kyle blame for the death of Kate’s mother?

9) Compare Kate’s first major confrontation with Josh early in the novel (pp. 53-55) and her final confrontation with her father (pp. 337-345). Are there any parallels? How has Kate

changed? Do you believe it is realistic that Kate could forgive and continue to love her father, as she claims she does, in spite of his on-going treatment of her?

10) During his time in “the center,” Michael comes to a fuller understanding of the meaning of forgiveness (p. 158-159). What does it mean to truly forgive, according to Michael? What qualities make such forgiveness possible?

11) The working title of this novel was *Of Angels and Archangels*. How does that title relate to the book? Who are the “angels” in the novel? What concept of angels does the novel advance?

## RESOURCES

Children afflicted with mood disorders often are misdiagnosed at least once since many of these disorders have similar and/or overlapping symptoms. Mood disorders are treatable, but finding the right medication or combination of medications can be tricky and scary. The links below can help.

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
[www.aacap.org](http://www.aacap.org)

Anxiety Disorders Association of America  
[www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org)

Attention Deficit Disorder Association  
[www.add.org](http://www.add.org)

Child and Adolescent Bipolar Foundation  
[www.bpkids.org](http://www.bpkids.org)

Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorders  
[www.chadd.org](http://www.chadd.org)

Children With Oppositional Defiant Disorder  
[http://www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts\\_for\\_families/children\\_with\\_oppositional\\_defiant\\_disorder](http://www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts_for_families/children_with_oppositional_defiant_disorder)

Depressive and Bipolar Support Alliance  
[www.dbsalliance.org](http://www.dbsalliance.org)

Juvenile Bipolar Research Foundation  
[www.bpchildresearch.org](http://www.bpchildresearch.org)

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill  
[www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)

National Alliance for Research on Schizophrenia and Depression  
[www.narsad.org](http://www.narsad.org)

National Association of School Psychologists  
[www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org)

National Institute of Mental Health Publications  
[www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/)

National Mental Health Association  
[www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org)

Obsessive-Compulsive Foundation  
[www.ocfoundation.org](http://www.ocfoundation.org)

The Bipolar Child  
[www.bipolarchild.com](http://www.bipolarchild.com)

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