

## Discussion Questions

- 1) Near the end of the book when Mollie still longs for life before the fire, Zack says “sometimes it is the hardest things that make us great.” What are the really hard things in your life? Do they have hidden blessings, or would you wish them away if you could?
- 2) Before the fire, Sophie had an endless supply of entertainment, but had never been required to work. Although entertainment is fun, can it ever provide a sense of satisfaction? In our modern era, when children have limitless sources of entertainment, how can we teach them the value that comes from doing something hard?
- 3) Mollie has two attractive suitors. Did she make the right choice?
- 4) Colonel Lowe has a strong moral code, but Zack often bends the rules. Do you agree with the deal Zack cut with Ralph Coulter to get his nephews into college in exchange for details about who killed Frank? Does this mean Zack doesn't have a moral code?
- 5) The dentist, Andrew Buchanan, had no family and craves the sense of belonging he finds at the church and with Zack's family. Do you know anyone in your neighborhood or workplace who seems rootless? What would it cost (or benefit) you to bring that person into the fold?
- 6) During the fire, Mollie notices the best and worst of people as they struggle to escape the flames. What makes some people become drunken revelers while others will allow their own homes to burn in order to help others? Is it possible to predict who will be a hero during a crisis and who will act selfishly?
- 7) Zack has immense loyalty and respect for Louis Hartman, who pulled him off the docks and launched him in the business world. Yet, at a crucial point, Zack turns his back on Louis in order to finalize insurance reform in the city. Was he right to do so? What happens when personal gratitude is at war with loyalty to a larger cause?
- 8) Mollie was never able to warm up to Colonel Lowe, even though she wanted to. Why was this? What would your advice to Mollie have been? Have you ever experienced this type of situation?
- 9) Near the end of the book, Mollie grabs a can of peaches to bring to a fancy auction. Did you agree more with her response or with Colonel Lowe's? Have you ever felt pushed into a social obligation when more pressing concerns from work or family were already stretching you too thin? Is there a better way to handle it than turning in a substandard performance?
- 10) Zack's attitude toward his Polish heritage strengthens throughout the book. Why is this? Do you have an ethnic, religious, or cultural heritage that has evolved over the years?