

"Heather Gudenkauf [is] the master of the smart, suspenseful small-town thriller."

—GILLY MACMILLAN,

New York Times bestselling author of *What She Knew* and *The Nanny*

A person is walking up a long, straight wooden staircase that leads into a misty, blue-toned forest. The person is seen from behind, walking away from the viewer towards the top of the stairs. The trees on either side are tall and thin, with their trunks visible through the fog. The overall atmosphere is mysterious and suspenseful.

THIS IS HOW I LIED

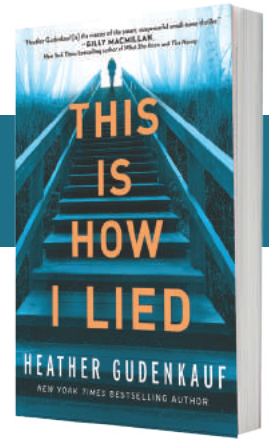


HEATHER GUDENKAUF

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

Discussion Guide

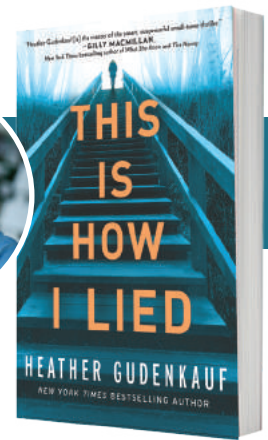
BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION *THIS IS HOW I LIED*



- 1) Like many sisters, Eve and Nola have a complex relationship and Eve often plays the caretaker role looking out for Nola. How do you think Nola's life would have been different had Eve lived?
- 2) At the beginning of the novel, Maggie volunteers to take on Eve's case now that new evidence has been discovered. Why do you think she chose to do this? As the book progressed and you learned more about her, what do you think her motives were?
- 3) Which character in the novel did you most closely identify with? Why?
- 4) Nola clearly never felt like she belonged in Grotto. Why do you think she chose to return to her childhood home?
- 5) Discuss the secrets that the characters kept from each other. How would their lives have been different if the characters had been honest with one another? Is it ever okay to keep a secret?
- 6) The caves are a central location in the novel; how would the story be different if the crime took place in another location?
- 7) Do you think Nola loved Eve? Why or why not?
- 8) What scene in the novel resonated most with you? Why?
- 9) What is the significance of the title? How does it relate to each of the main characters?
- 10) Where do you envision the characters soon after the story ends? What will their lives be like five years from now?

Discussion Guide

Q&A WITH HEATHER GUDENKAUF



Q. Where did the idea for *This Is How I Lied* come from?

A. Just like with many of my novels, I got the idea from the news. I've been fascinated by how modern technology is being used to close decades-old cold cases. I read *I'll Be Gone in the Dark* by Michelle McNamara about the Golden State Killer and how the perpetrator managed to escape capture for decades, and the pain and the victims and their families have endured, waiting for justice. Sadly, just before the book was published, Michelle McNamara passed away and never saw the arrest of the man who ended up being charged with the crimes. As I wrote *This Is How I Lied*, I thought it would be interesting to explore how a cold case might play out in a small town where the inhabitants (and the guilty party) believed the truth behind the crime would never be discovered.

Q. The novel takes place in Grotto, a small Iowa town with a circuit of caves running beneath it. Is this setting based on a real place?

A. Grotto is loosely based on the town of Maquoketa, Iowa. Until I moved to this part of Iowa, I never realized that Iowa had cave systems. Visitors to the state park can literally step back thousands of years. The limestone caves and bluffs are beautiful, haunting and have something for everyone. You can take a casual stroll through some of the caves and have to army crawl through some of the others. Old clothes and a flashlight are a must! The caves made the perfect backdrop for a thriller and I was excited to include them in *This Is How I Lied*.

Q. What kind of research did you do for the novel?

A. Fortunately for me, my hometown has a police chief who will take the time (after a long day of keeping our community safe) to patiently answer my many law enforcement related questions. Here are some example of one of the questions I asked (notice I opened with "Quick question"—they are never quick questions).

Hi Mark,

Quick question: If a police department wants to have evidence from a cold case retested, how do they go about doing this? Does the chief put in a request to the state lab? Can you remind me where the evidence would be stored in the event of a cold case? At the state lab or would it be at the police department or in this case at the sheriff's department?

How long might it take for the evidence to be retested?

Thank you!

Heather

Here's another one.

Hi Mark,

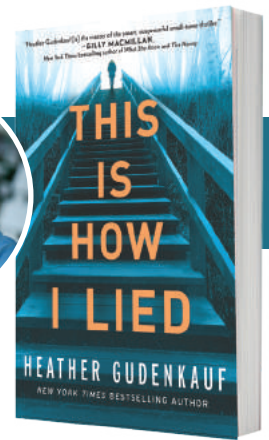
Another question! Do you think small-town police stations would have security cameras looking over their staff parking area? If so, would they be periodically taped over? How often? I need something to happen in the parking lot but I don't want any video.

Thank you!

Heather

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The man is a saint.

I also reached out to large animal vets who are NOTHING like Nola. They provided me with insights into their day-to-day lives—amazing!

Q. *This Is How I Lied* hit the shelves in the middle of a pandemic. What was it like to have a book released during such an unsettling time?

A. Like everyone, my first thought has been hoping that my family and friends stay healthy. It's been heartbreaking to see all the suffering—physically, emotionally, economically—throughout the world. So, in the scheme of things, my book is somewhat inconsequential. But, I worked really hard on this novel (with tons of support from others) and I'm excited to share it with everyone. For me, I've always turned to books and reading during difficult times. My hope is that *This Is How I Lied* will provide a few hours of escape for readers.

Q. Do you think you might talk about COVID-19 in future books?

A. I just finished the first draft of my novel set to come out in 2021, and I do mention COVID-19 in passing. The virus doesn't play a big part in the story, but I felt it was important to acknowledge it. I think as writers, this is one of the ways we explore and process what's going on in the world. We've all been impacted by COVID-19 and some have lost loved ones or will lose loved ones—so I think it will become a big part of literature and the arts moving forward.

Q. Are small towns like Grotto really hotbeds of secrecy?

A. My immediate thought to this question is, yes, absolutely! But then I thought I better check around with the experts. I reached out on social media and the responses I received from readers were a resounding YES. But with the caveat that there are a lot of secrets but they are difficult to keep under wraps for very long.

Some described small towns as places where people could go to hide their pasts while others said they knew people in their towns who work very hard to keep up the illusion of maintaining false perfection. Others thought that some secrets are known to everyone in town, but no one dares to speak of them. This was one of my favorite responses: "I lived in a town of a thousand people. Everyone knew everything *before* it was done happening."

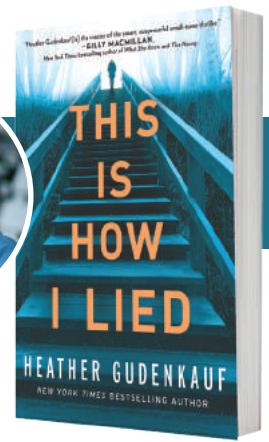
So I think the correct answer is all towns have secrets, some are just better at hiding them than others.

Q. Of all the genres, what is it that draws you to write thrillers?

A. I've enjoyed writing since I was a child. But as is typical with most writers, I was and am, first and foremost an avid reader. As a child my favorite place in the world was our public library and I spent as much time as possible with my nose in a book. I loved mysteries and plowed my way through all the Encyclopedia Brown, Boxcar Children and Nancy Drew mysteries. As I got older, I continued to read mysteries and thrillers but my interests expanded to a variety of genres. I've always admired the way writers could take me away to different places and times through the written word. I always knew I wanted to try my hand at writing but didn't sit down and seriously begin until after I was married and had my children and when I did, I knew that I wanted to include a mysterious element to my books.

Discussion Guide

Q&A WITH HEATHER GUDENKAUF



Q. Do you have any writing rituals or obsessions?

- A. I wouldn't say I have any particular rituals or obsessions except I do like to have music playing while I write. With music playing in the background I'm still able to focus on my writing without being too distracted by the world around me. Otherwise, I can pretty much write anywhere. I write in coffee shops, in bed, in front of the fireplace, in the car, outdoors.

Q. What's a book you'd like to read again for the first time?

- A. If I could read a book again for the first time it would have to be Betty Smith's *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. When you close a book and realize immediately that you desperately miss the characters and can't stand not knowing what has become of them, you know it is a very special book. Betty Smith had a way of writing and talking to the reader in such a way that I found myself in dialogue with her. *Yes, that is exactly how it is!* I would exclaim (most of the time this was an *inner* dialogue, but not always). There is such a truth to her stories, a turn of phrase that leaves you nodding your head—I would like to experience that feeling for the first time all over again.