



**Reader's Guide for *Where Have I Been All My Life?*
Cheryl Rice**

1. *Where Have I Been All My Life* offers many memorable stories. Which stories or scenes were the most impactful for you? Which ones were the most shocking, the most inspiring, or the funniest?
2. Throughout the book, Cheryl describes both a literal and figurative feeling of “homesickness.”
 - a. When in your life have you felt homesick, and for what reason?
 - b. Have you ever felt homesick even when you were at home?
 - c. Have you ever revisited your childhood home?
3. Grief is another condition that Cheryl wrestles with in the book.
 - a. Have you experienced profound grief in your life? For who or what?
 - b. Could you relate to Cheryl’s experience that her mom wasn’t quite dead but merely lost – and to her strong desire to look for her and find her mom alive and well again?
 - c. Have you ever played “grief games”? If so, what kind and did they help?
4. Cheryl yearns to unite with her father in their grieving but finds he is so lost in his anguish, this is impossible for him.
 - a. How did your own ways of dealing with grief contrast with that of someone else who experienced the same loss?
 - b. Did this bring you closer or farther apart?
5. Cheryl used longing as a substitute for intimacy. This had negative consequences such as poor dating choices, underappreciating her marriage and not being able to receive the gifts of others or live fully in the present moment.
 - a. Could you relate to Cheryl’s pattern of dating unavailable men?
 - b. Did you ever give your dates a “test” to see if they were right for you?
 - c. What devices did/do you use to buffer yourself from intimacy?

6. Cheryl went into marriage with an unrealistic and unsustainable image of what it would be like and what her role was – primarily as healer and caretaker. When the reality did not reflect her fantasy she reverted back to her longing.
 - a. What were your fantasies or illusions of what marriage would be like and how did they play out in reality?
 - b. What role did you think you needed to play to have a happy marriage?

7. Cheryl feels desperate to give David gifts as a way of proving her value. It is maddening to her that David refuses them.
 - a. What did you think of this?
 - b. Have you ever felt desperate to prove your worthiness to someone? If so, what happened?

8. Cheryl writes letters as a means of self-discovery and healing throughout the book.
 - a. Which letter was most moving or impactful for you?
 - b. Have you ever written letters you haven't sent?
 - c. Have you ever written letters you imagined being penned by someone else?
 - d. Who would you most like to write a letter to in your own life – dead or alive?
 - e. Who would you most like to receive a letter from?

9. One of Cheryl's grief games involved not eating as a way of getting her mother back. Not eating was also a distraction for the full on grief she was feeling. How do you distract yourself from difficult feelings?

10. Cheryl shares a dream in the book where she meets an overweight, elderly woman named Frieda riding naked on a bike.
 - a. What was it like for you to read this dream?
 - b. What did Frieda represent to Cheryl?

11. One of the losses Cheryl comes to grieve is not having her own children—something she thought she would do but for many reasons did not.
 - a. How did you feel about the letter Cheryl wrote to her unborn child?
 - b. What sorts of conversations have you had with yourself about that choice and do you ever imagine having made a different choice?
 - c. Is there a role in your life that you imagined taking on but have not? How do you feel about that?

12. A key chapter in the book is “They Did the Best They Could” where Cheryl wrestles with her ambivalence about acknowledging the unintended consequences of her parents’ behavior when she was a child. After all, she knows so many others have it much worse. She loves her parents and she knows they love her. It was agony for her to acknowledge what was missing.
 - a. If it was so hard to acknowledge what was missing, why did she do it? Why did David push her?
 - b. Have you ever discussed your childhood with your parents’? How did it go?
13. What were your perceptions of Cheryl’s mom and her impact on Cheryl’s struggles? Can you relate to her mom in any way?
14. Cheryl’s dog becomes the safest relationship for her during the worst of her grief. Have you ever felt that kind of kinship with an animal? What characteristics of your pet did you most admire?
15. What did you think of Cheryl’s professed love for her therapist, David, and the way he handled it? Have you ever experienced this kind of transference?
16. When Cheryl visits her brother and sister-in-law to support them through Jamie’s surgery, it is the first crisis Cheryl faces without her mother. Can you recall a time when you had to step up without your go-to person being there? What was it like for you?
17. What characteristics—both positive and negative, do you think Cheryl inherited from her parents? And how do you think those characteristics influenced Cheryl’s life?
18. In addition to the loss of her mother, Cheryl also describes the mysterious loss of a very close friendship with Kelly. Have you ever had a similar experience with a friend?
19. *Where Have I Been All My Life?* isn’t written in a typical chronological fashion. How do you think that contributes to the effect and emotional resonance of the book overall?