



Book Club & Reader Guide

Where There's Smoke: A Texas Love Story **by Rees Walther**



A Note from the Author

Where There's Smoke began as a playful challenge from my wife. My son and I had always teased her about her love for Hallmark movies—how we could predict the endings within minutes. She dared me to write one myself. So, I began... thinking it would be simple. It started out as a story about a man starting a barbecue joint in Texas.

But as the story unfolded, and the words and story line began to evolve, it grew into something deeper and far more personal. When I began writing about Mae Whitaker's mother and her declining health, I found myself drawing from my own experiences with my mother's illness and her passing. This story became a space for me to process, grieve, and eventually heal.

My hope is that this book offers you something similar—a quiet space to reflect on love, loss, and the beauty found in new beginnings.

— Rees Walther



Suggested Discussion Questions

1. Mae and Jim both face defining choices between career and connection. What does the book suggest about success versus fulfillment?
2. In Chapter 2, Mae experiences a major emotional shift. How does this early turning point set the tone for the rest of the story?
3. Chapter 11 reveals Mae breaking down alone. What does this moment say about strength, vulnerability, and the masks we wear for others?
4. How did you feel during Chapter 19 and the events surrounding Sandy's passing? Did it mirror any personal experiences or emotions for you?

5. The funeral scene in Chapter 23 becomes a celebration of life through music and memory. How do the arts help people process grief? How does Mae's poem function as a turning point in her emotional journey?
 6. What role does the concept of "home" play in the novel—and how does it change for Mae and Jim by the end?
 7. What line or scene stuck with you the most? Why?
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Behind the Scenes

Much of Mae's emotional journey came from my own heart. Her experiences with her parents—especially the quiet, crushing moments of trying to hold it together—were drawn directly from my life. Chapter 19, when Sandy passes, was by far the most difficult for me to write. I had to step away for days after finishing that chapter.

A Line to Remember

"Life is a story we get to write, chapter by chapter. There will be moments of heartbreak, moments of joy, and everything in between. What we choose to dwell on shapes the people we become..."

Bonus Touch

In Chapter 23, Jim puts Mae's poem to music—a poem she wrote for her mother. It becomes a powerful symbol of memory, legacy, and healing. Consider discussing how poetry or music has helped you or someone you love through a season of grief. Which poems or songs were the most meaningful in an emotional journey?